とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）20
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ
電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 20

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Toaru Majutsu no Index 20

October 18.

A declaration from Russia marks the beginning of World War 3.

What began as a clash between Russia and Academy City has become a large scale conflict that's dragging the whole world with it. All of this happened because of political intervention from behind the scenes done by the last member of "God's Right Seat", Fiamma.

Yet, even in a world ravaged by the flames of war, some people keep moving on.

Kamijou Touma, a high school student from Academy City, keeps moving on to free Index from a comatose state induced by Fiamma's usurpation of her spiritual tool.

Accelerator, the strongest Level 5, keeps moving on to save Last Order, who took a massive amount of burden during the encounter with the mysterious existence Aiwass.

Hamazura Shiage, the former underling of the underground organization "ITEM", keeps moving on to cure Takitsubo Rikou, who was weakened due to abuse of the ability stimulant "Body Crystal".

All three of them, each with different thoughts, are heading to an intensely hostile Russia. What awaits them there is...

When science and magic cross paths, the story shall begin——!

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とある魔術の禁書目録⑳

鎌池和馬

電撃文庫
610

9784048683937

1920193006100

ISBN978-4-04-868393-7
C0193 ¥610E

ASCII MEDIA WORKS
Published by ASCII Media Works

Recommended Retail Price: 610 JPY
*Consumption levy will be added to the price separately

Kamachi Kazuma

The boss to defeat in this volume would be "that character". I am writing this volume with the main idea of making one think 'Whoa, a small change of viewpoint changes the impression a lot.' The ability to not give up no matter what — using your head to achieve results that surpass your own abilities — is what you would call true strength, don't you think?

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1–20
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 1 & 2
Heavy Object

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I took a license for medium bikes during breaks from work. I have never ridden a vehicle, be it two or four wheels, for about 10 years though, so I'm more or less a beginner. Maybe when I get the time, I should go for a trip far away?

カバー／口絵印刷

"Today is my lucky day. I thought this would be a little harder.
I never expected to get you so easily."
Final member of the Roman Catholic Church's dark side, "God's Right Seat" — Fiamma of the Right
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"What are you expecting me to do by passing such useless information!?"
Academy City's Level 0 student — Kamijou Touma
"I have some good news here. I, Lessar, have a tail that stretches out under my skirt. But the truth is that there are no tights; only panties."
Member of a magic cabal reserve army which caused a coup in Britain, "New Light" — Lessar

"...That's completely stupid. Don't try to get on my nerves."
Academy City's strongest Level 5 — Accelerator

"Don't worry. It's ok, Hamazura. Let us make an early move."
Former member of Item — Takitsubo Rikou
"What should we do...? Where would be a good place for us to escape to!?"
Former underling of Item — Hamazura Shiage

"I don't mind if you think of me as a cold person. But the situation has become this delicate. A single careless mistake can cause many innocent people to be killed because of that."

Central figure and the origin of the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations' name — **Elizalina**

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Proclamation of War

Now is the time for efforts to protect the world and all of mankind who fight to continue living in this world.

In today's world all of humanity faces similar crises: The greenhouse effect, rising sea levels caused by environmental damage, and the shortages of oil and other fossil fuels. All such world-wide events are the result of a single culprit: Academy City of Science and Technology. If we do not put a halt to their continuous abuse of science and technology in such a disorganized manner, then this planet, and all who live in it, will face extinction.

To protect our common humanity, and the future of all forms of life on this planet, Academy City ought to halt all projects and pursuits currently undertaken. Moreover, in order to analyze and solve problems common to all walks of life, I hereby demand the holder of the most advanced technology on this planet give full access of that technology to myself.

Despite continuous pursuit of a peace proposal, Academy City has mercilessly rejected all such attempts. Such rejection demonstrates that Academy City continually defies integration into the global community. I had planned to wait until determining their purpose and the motivation behind it, but to live on this planet while it is in crisis, a crisis that exposes all forms of life to the existence of evil, is something I will not tolerate.

I will wait until 0:00 Moscow Standard Time on October 19 for Academy City's reply. If they have not submitted their answer by such time, I will interpret their lack of response as a declaration of war, and will immediately consider the use of offensive engagements with intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Furthermore, I will consider the friendly relations Academy City currently maintains with Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and making similar judgments. If Academy City continues to insist on selfishly pursuing their own interests and, moreover, ignoring the plight of all outside forms of life, I shall

recognize them as an enemy. For our posterity and the posterity of all future generations, we shall fight them wholeheartedly.

October 18, Great Command of the Russian Federation, Soldier I. Krainikov

Prologue: A Sky that Stinks of Gunpowder.
Shooting_Game.

And so World War III began.

October 19th would remain in people's minds as the day of fate for a long time to come.

No matter how simply it was stated or how clearly God's Right Seat had been pulling the strings from behind the scenes for their own ends, a war was not so easy to stop once it had begun.

Academy City's last line of defense lay in the air above the Sea of Japan. If their enemy nation of Russia broke through that line with assault landing crafts or strategic bombers, the small island nation would be turned into a sea of fire and blood.

That was how everyone thought it would end up.

Even if Academy City held scientific technology 20 or 30 years ahead of the rest of the world, it was still just a city that had about 2.3 million residents most of whom were children. On the other hand, Russia was a large nation and it was one of the world's 3 greatest military powers along with America and China. Even though Academy City had the upper hand when it came to technology, they would likely be destroyed fairly quickly if Russia overwhelmed them with sheer numbers.

However…

It was currently October 30th.

Despite being with Russia, the side that should have had the overwhelming advantage, Ekalielya A. Pronskaya, a female Russian Air Force pilot, was aware

of sweat spreading below her gloves that were gripping the stick. The sweat was not from excitement. It was clearly a cold sweat.

She operated a cutting edge craft that used a canard wing for maximum maneuverability and that was considered easily capable of dealing with an American stealth fighter in a dogfight. Despite having come with a few dozen other identical crafts, Ekalielya was beginning to seriously regret entering that airspace.

War was waged at the convenience of the tops of the military and the politicians.

The soldiers on the battlefield could do nothing about it.

Occasionally, you had to be prepared to shoot down someone you would rather not.

Especially in wars that occurred as suddenly as that one, whatever the reason for the attack was, striking first left one with a sense of guilt.

However, that was not why she regretted it.

Ekalielya simply thought she was going to die with the way the battle was going.

“What are those?” said one of her fellow pilots over the radio.

The other pilot did not use the military abbreviated codes and sounded like a frightened child.

“Are our enemies here really fighters!? Those things are just too huge!!”

Their enemies were called HsF-00s. They were Academy City supersonic fighters. Because they used the frame of the HsB-02 supersonic bombers, the fighters were almost 80 meters long. They were currently sweeping over the Sea of Japan at a tremendous speed of over 7000 kph.

Fighters were usually only about 15-20 meters long and their speed was usually about 2500 kph. The Academy City weapons were odd both in their size and their speed. The bigger something was and the faster it moved, the more inertia it held. Normally, a craft like those would break apart if it made the same sharp turns a smaller fighter made. And even if it didn’t, the intense pressure would

crush the pilot's organs.

"(…Hard Science, hm?)" Ekalielya muttered under her breath in annoyance.

Apparently, the "Hs" initials given to Academy City's weapons referred to the fact that they swept away all sorts of mystical darkness with the power of science.

"What a fucking joke. The power of science? If anyone's stepping into the realm of the occult, it's them!!"

There were only 10 of them.

Only ten HsF-00s were deployed over the entire Sea of Japan.

With their overwhelming speed of over 7000 kph and their overwhelming range with the weaponry installed, a single HsF-00 could maintain air superiority over a huge area.

With the HsF-00s as the main line and a number of smaller crafts (Smaller relative to the HsF-00s. They were about the same size as the Sukhoi that Ekalielya was in.) flying around the area as well, the Academy City forces were overwhelming the Russian Air Force. The reinforced glass canopies of the smaller crafts were completely black, so it was unclear whether anyone was onboard piloting them.

"Did you know that Academy City doesn't even have an army? Right now, we're dealing with a group called Anti-Skill that's basically like a police force," said a fellow pilot.

"Are you trying to say they don't have the ability to attack? How are those things defensive weapons!? When you're making stealth fighters that can fly to the other side of the world without resupplying, you're clearly developing them to invade!!"

"Did you hear their official response to the proclamation of war? They said there is no need for them to enter into the killing, but they don't believe it's right to sit by watching when they possess the power needed to stop the war and the tragedy. But they're clearly intending to start killing!!"

They doubted the HsF-00s and smaller crafts were the full extent of the enemy forces.

And the weapons being used for the defensive line could easily be used for invasion.

It was unclear who was actually cornered.

Ekalielya had a strange but strong feeling that Russian cities would be turned to seas of flames the instant she gave up mentally.

That irrational feeling caused the flames of anger to burn within her as one of the HsF-00s moved in front of her.

The true battle began.

Since their enemies could travel at more than 3 times their speed, Ekalielya and her fellow pilots had no way of pursuing the enemy. Not only could they not get behind the enemy in order to get a safe lock on them, they couldn't even get close enough to be in range. Their enemies could travel at 7000 kph. Just by going all out for a short time, they could easily move 100 km away and then head back.

(They can't be using a normal amount of fuel.)

Ekalielya knew she was outmatched, but as a professional soldier, she desperately searched for a way out.

(In other words, their flight time must be incredibly short in exchange for their incredible speed. We might have a chance of victory if we drag this out.)

But then an enemy communication came in completely ignoring the encryption.

"If you're thinking of going into a marathon battle, think again. My craft uses the frictional heat on the armor surface as energy. In other words, it gets more efficient the faster it goes. That can reduce its consumption of fuel by up to 90%."

"!?"

“Don’t think you can deal with the smaller ones this way either. …I mean, c’mon. Our weapons were designed to specialize in interception. Of course we have ways of ensuring long flight times.”

As she heard those words, Ekalielya saw something odd in the corner of her vision. One of the smaller crafts let loose a missile without igniting it and another of the same crafts flew by and caught the missile in a joint in its wing. It had resupplied.

They started passing metal boxes filled with machine gun ammunition, as well. As they flew past each other in something similar to aerial acrobatics, a tentacle-like tube stretched out from one and it refueled. The entire process looked something like juggling and Ekalielya would never have thought it possible in a high-speed flight.

By preparing a special midair refueling craft, they didn’t have to return to base.

And by constructing a resupply network continuing through the sky from the base to the battlefield, they could stay in the air longer and head to farther distances than normally would be possible.

(Kh…!! Then we just have to cut off that supply route!!)

Ekalielya adjusted her grip on the stick, but she had no idea what to do specifically.

The smaller crafts were clearly turning at inhuman angles, but the 80 meter HsF-00s moved oddly, too.

There were irregular maneuvers that could be taken with a normal fighter in order to fool the eyes of one’s enemy. There was the Split S, the barrel roll, and the Pugachev’s Cobra that originated in Russia. Those techniques instantly reversed a disadvantageous situation where the enemy was on your tail, but pilots on the battlefields actually rather disliked those special maneuvers.

Swinging the aircraft around in an irregular special maneuver brought on powerful inertial G’s which made the pilot’s body suffer. If you made a showy maneuver that blurred ones vision while there was a lack of blood to the brain lessening your decision making ability, the enemy could easily get away before you could fire even if you did manage to get behind them.

And yet the HsF-00s did not even always point their noses forward. They could move straight forward while the entire craft was angled at 90 degrees and they could spin around at high speed like a top. Even the very first assumptions did not fit them and it made one wonder how they managed to maintain their form as aircrafts. It was amazing that they did not come to pieces and that the pilot inside was still alive.

And their attacks were accurate.

Their missiles took turns many times sharper then the Russian ones while continuing to chase their target. Their machine gun bullets tore through the Russian main wings in a straight line. And on top of it all, they also used something that looked like a laser. Ekalielya's comrades were shot down one after another by those attacks that they had no idea how to evade.

And on top of even that…

"Oh, hey, can you hear me? This is Kameyama Ryuuta of the Academy City Air Defense Force. While I'm part of Anti-Skill and therefore a schoolteacher and you're a professional soldier, you don't need to feel bad about not being able to get a lock on me. I actually wanted to be an air defense pilot, but there were some issues relating to the position within Academy City, so I got my teaching license just so I would have the proper position to get the job."

The enemy sounded completely carefree in his transmission.

"Now that I've introduce myself, let's get down to the issue at hand. It seems all of you are fine since the missiles were set to detonate at a distance. We were trying to get creative in order to make sure everyone could escape with their parachutes."

"!! Are you mocking us…!?"

Forgetting that her radio encryption had been easily cracked, Ekalielya yelled back in anger. However the man on the other end remained oddly silent for a bit before continuing.

"Dammit, a female pilot. I'd heard people with smaller frames were quite useful due to bringing on less inertia, but…damn. Now I have to try even harder not to kill you."

He seemed to be saying he could easily kill her at any time if he wanted to.

It was a stereotypical way of mocking the weak.

He was using strange technology and looking down on anyone who didn't understand it like they were cavemen. His gentlemanly way of acting made the contempt stand out even more.

However, Ekalielya could not overcome the gap in ability between his craft and hers no matter how angry she got.

As if she were chasing after a modern jet fighter with the Wright brothers' plane, she simply could not reach Academy City's HsF-00s.

"You fucking giant flies! I hope the inertial G's crush you!! How can you carry out maneuvers like that without killing yourself!?"

"We didn't really do much. Basically, the human body cannot withstand a dogfight at above a certain speed. That makes things simple. If you can strengthen the body, then you can fly larger and faster fighters."

"…?"

"*Our bodies have been frozen at minus 70 degrees*. The functions of each organ are carried out by a life support system and the brain's decision making functionality is set to be the only thing operating. And with a portion of the calculations left to the machine, the weak electrical signals read from the scalp are used to operate the fighter. …See? That makes the body 'harder' allowing us to exceed the old limits set by inertia. According to the people on the medical side of things, the partial freezing tech needed to maintain thoughts while freezing the body was a little tricky."

A shudder traveled across Ekalielya's body.

She had a feeling she had just caught a glimpse of the fundamental difference between him and her.

"Now then. Let's end these boring explanations and get to the real issue at hand."

As soon as he said that, the HsF-00’s silhouette changed.

Areas on the top of the giant main wings detached like small birds and were blown backwards. It happened in about 10 places. The small objects seemed to be attached with some kind of thin wire or something and they flew around like independent sports kites.

“Those are laser units for attacking an enemy from multiple angles at once,” said Kameyama, the enemy pilot, as the HsF-00 spun around and the small weapons flew around like morning stars.

His words were oozing with an obvious sense of leeway and contempt.

“You can’t escape from something moving at the speed of light. Prepare yourself, young lady, because I’m going to gently shoot you down.”

Chapter 1: Good and Evil, They Each Enter the Country. *World_War_III.*

Part 1

Even the digital display showing the date of October 30th seemed to be shivering in the cold.

The car's heater was mostly broken.

As Hamazura Shiage drove an old, beat up car along the snow-covered ground, his hands gripping the steering wheel were cold. No matter how far he went, nothing but flat empty land spread out before him. The commonplace asphalt road was barely visible buried in the snow. The area was so empty that he almost didn't think he would notice if he strayed off the road.

That scenery was simply something that could not be seen in Japan.

He had heard that Hokkaido was a fairly vast land, but even that wasn't on this scale.

This area was like a white desert.

They were in western Russia.

It seemed they were near the border of the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations.

In order to escape their pursuers in Academy City, they had used a supersonic passenger plane's autopilot to flee to Russia. They hadn't had much time to prepare, so they had almost no money to help with their flight.

(…I guess I can’t really complain too much since I stole it, but damn. Maybe it isn’t an issue with the air conditioner and we’re just not dressed properly. The need for heavy clothing here is a lot different than in Japan…)

The car’s paint was coming off and brown rust could be seen on it. While gripping the wheel, Hamazura glanced over at the passenger seat.

A short girl wearing a pink track suit was sitting there.

She was Takitsubo Rikou.

She was in bad shape health-wise due to the side effects of a drug (?) called Body Crystal. She was leaning limply in her seat producing an unhealthy sweat similar to someone with a fever. Hamazura wanted to get her to a doctor, but he knew that wouldn’t solve the problem. Body Crystal was a top secret substance in Academy City. A doctor outside of the city would have no idea how to heal her.

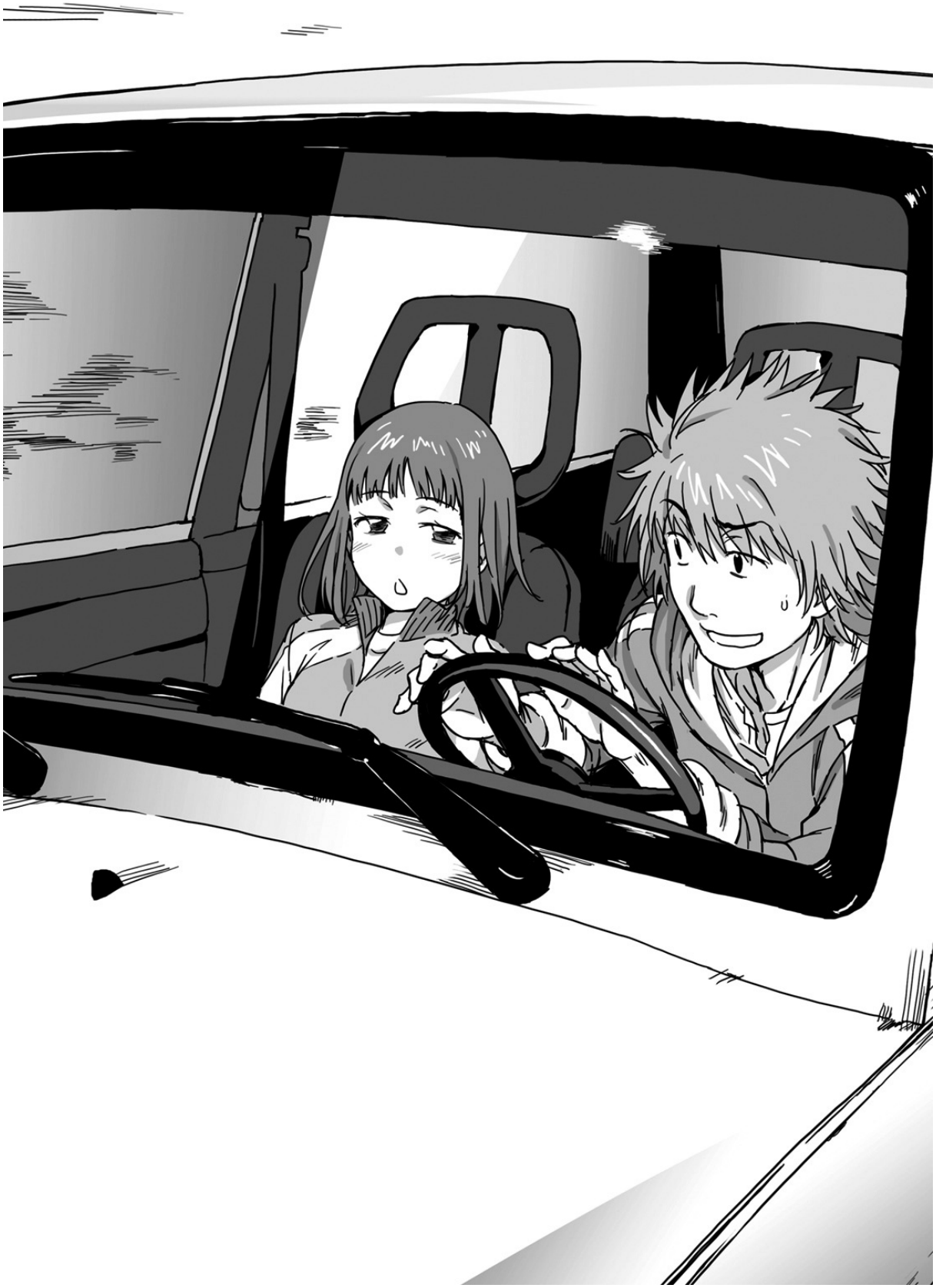
They were on the run from Academy City, the one place that could save Takitsubo.

(We can’t fight Academy City on our own. And even if we could, utterly destroying the city would also destroy the technology needed to save Takitsubo. Whatever we do, we have to return to Academy City and rely on their cutting edge tech in order to save her.)

However, if they just surrendered and returned to Academy City, Hamazura and Takitsubo wouldn’t be free to do what they wanted. And the odds of them being killed were not exactly low. As such, he needed to come up with a plan to ensure their safety.

(So we’ll fight them by finding “something” while on the run here in Russia and using that to “negotiate”. If things go well, we can use whatever it is to get Takitsubo healed, too. That’s our only hope.)

“Hamazura, what is it?”



“Nothing,” Hamazura replied with a smile. “I was just thinking that, whatever we’re going to do here, we’re gonna need some money. The money in our wallets when we left Academy City wasn’t much and we can’t even use that right away because it isn’t Russian money. We need to get some somewhere.”

They could always sell the stolen car he was driving, but Hamazura didn’t feel that was the best plan. Finding the kind of shady dealer that would accept a stolen car wasn’t exactly easy. He could manage it in Academy City, but he didn’t know how things worked in Russia.

And he didn’t know much Russian. Academy City and Russia were enemies in a large scale war, so it might cause a major issue if some Asians who spoke Japanese were spotted.

That meant…

“I guess we’ll just have to steal some.”

“But…” Takitsubo hesitated.

However, that was their only option.

As if in response to their plan, they spotted a small store ahead. The store was connected to a gas station and it sold canned foods and other preserved foods most likely for those on long distance drives.

“Wait here,” Hamazura said to Takitsubo as he parked the car a bit away from the store. “I’ll be back with some money.”

…Hamazura had said that, but he was actually fairly worried.

First of all, he wasn’t in Japan. The usage of guns was treated differently. He had a small handgun, but they could have a gun or even a rifle for self defense.

And…

(There’s a war.)

Takitsubo had translated the Russian news they had picked up on the car radio, but the word still didn't feel real to him.

(To the Russian people, we're their biggest enemies. If they find out that we came from Academy City, it wouldn't surprise me if they gang up on us.)

War.

Just saying the word wasn't really enough. He had always thought of war as something that occurred in faraway countries that you would only see on the news, but it was occurring somewhere in the world right that very moment. He wasn't sure if it didn't feel real to him because he simply hadn't had time to think about it since they had escaped Academy City, or if it was because they had never been thrown into a real battlefield full of bullets and shells flying back and forth. According to the news on the car radio, Academy City forces had been deployed to help evacuate and defend the facilities that worked with Academy City within Russia. However, Hamazura still didn't feel any real sense of danger.

He had no idea what would happen from then on.

Hamazura honestly didn't care who won, who lost, or what effect it all had on who guided the world. As long as that ridiculous war ended quickly and someone who would protect him and Takitsubo had some control over things, he didn't really care about the rest.

Hamazura thought about all that, but what he was truly worried about lay elsewhere. He may have been thinking about the problem of the war in order to avert his gaze from his true worry.

That true worry was the fact that he had to attack that store with a clerk inside. It may have been an extremely selfish excuse, but doing that was a lot different from stealing a car or an ATM. When he thought about the possibility of being forced to use his gun, he felt something heavy deep in his gut.

Hamazura checked the safety of the small handgun in his pocket again and again.

(I have to make sure—make sure—that I don't hurt the clerk in there!! All I need is what's inside the cash register. I'll only point the gun at him, that's all. If I'm going to fire a warning shot, I'll make sure to point the barrel up!!)

Repeating those things in his head, he gave a small, vaguely-directed prayer. Just before entering the store, he put up his hoodie's hood so his head was deep inside and put on the gloves that had been in the stolen car.

As he opened the door, he pulled out his handgun.

(I have to make sure I don't hurt the clerk!!)

And then Hamazura saw the female clerk with her arms and legs bound with duct tape and saying "Nnn! Nnn!" because her mouth was covered.

He also saw a masked man who looked a bit like a professional wrestler holding her down and pressing a blade up to her throat.

The large man was over 2 meters tall and he wasn't alone. He had two companions. They looked over as Hamazura opened the small door and came in.

"Who the hell are you?" they said in Russian.

Hamazura hadn't understood them and he merely responded by saying the words in Japanese he had been preparing to say.

"This is a robbery. Put your hands up."

Takitsubo heard multiple gunshots.

She turned her head while sitting in the passenger seat of the stolen car and eventually saw Hamazura Shiage approaching having left the store. It seemed the robbery was over. He was holding quite a few large beige paper bags in both arms. At least one must have been full of food because it had a long loaf of French bread sticking out. Another had the end of a wool scarf and what looked like part of a folded up coat sticking out.

As Hamazura opened the driver side door and got in, Takitsubo asked him a question.

"Hamazura, were you successful?"

“The clerk was so thankful she gave me all sorts of stuff!! We even got gas for the car!!”

“?”

As Takitsubo looked on in puzzlement, the stolen car headed off once more.

Part 2

Accelerator was hidden aboard a freight train on an international railroad.

The railroad crossed the continent of Eurasia and was the longest railroad in the world. Normally, it would take more than 2 weeks to get from the first terminal to the last, but that was not true then. Due to the beginning of World War III, a large amount of military materiel needed to be transported. The normal schedules and the safety regulations were being completely ignored so the trains could travel at high speed.

Either those preparations alone had quite an effect or they had brought out some kind of prototype from a lab somewhere because the freight train Accelerator was on was traveling at over 500 kph. Its speed was on par with a linear motor car. The front of the lead car tapered off like the tip of a fighter or a space shuttle and the walls of the cars were rough like modern racing swimsuits.

(A war, hm? Fucking ridiculous.)

For an instant, Accelerator had thought the war was a strategy on Academy City’s part to chase after Last Order and himself, but he concluded that he was over thinking things. Because of his activities in the dark side of that city, he knew that actions this out in the open were not like the city at all. They liked to keep things hidden.

They had carried out that kind of open activity in the French city of Avignon, but that had most likely been because there was *something* there that had made it

necessary. He didn’t know what that something was though.

But…

(Even if I set aside the possibility this is a plan created by that god damn city to get us, there’s still gotta be some kind of hidden reason behind it.)

Academy City was very influential. Normally, they would take measures to prevent a large scale war from occurring in the first place. And yet a war had started that was large enough to destroy the science-ruled world. Thinking there was something behind it wasn’t just some crazy idea.

And Academy City had responded to whoever was picking a fight with them. There may have been something they wanted enough to go to war over.

Accelerator didn’t really care about that.

That was not what mattered to him then.

(…Dammit.)

He was not alone.

Last Order, a girl who looked around ten, lay next to him.

She was a clone created from the cells of the #3 Level 5. She had been used to bring a monster known as Aiwass into the world, which was a major burden to her brain. Due to that, she was merely lying there limply unable to even walk around on her own legs.

Last Order was wearing a button down shirt over a camisole, but she had a thick blanket on top of that. The blanket had been inside the freight train. Accelerator had also found some mainly white winter clothes and put them on.

“…Where are we? says Misaka as Misaka looks around.”

“In a train.”

“Where are Yomikawa and Yoshikawa? says Misaka as Misaka asks a question.”

“They aren’t here right now, but we’ll see them soon. I promise.”

“I see…” Last Order’s words trailed off a bit. “If they were here too, we could have Yomikawa make us another Salisbury steak soup, says Misaka as Misaka is a little disappointed.”

“…”

“But I’m glad, says Misaka as Misaka feels relieved. I finally get to see your face again, says Misaka as Misaka stretches out her arm.”

She said that, but her small arm did not move.

Her fingertips merely twitched a bit.

Whether she had noticed that or not, Last Order continued speaking.

“Let’s all eat meals together again, says Misaka as Misaka gives her proposal. Yomikawa’s Salisbury steak soup is really good, says Misaka as Misaka boasts.”

In contrast to her smile, she sounded like speaking was painful for her.

(…Why did it end up like this?)

Accelerator gritted his teeth while crouching down.

(What did she do? Did she do anything that required she end up in a state where she can’t even move her own fingers? Why did this shit have to happen to her?)

As he put more strength into his jaw, an unpleasant noise could be heard.

In that place, she was not free or safe.

Accelerator felt vehement resentment towards the vague idea of fate. He knew it wasn’t an issue that would be solved by holding a grudge against someone, but he couldn’t help but feel angry.

He gripped his modern cane so hard he thought he would smash its grip.

A worldwide war was beginning on that planet.

Various people from countries all across the world would be fighting for the sake of those who were important to them.

But there was no one to fight for her.

Despite the fact that people all across the world were preparing to risk their lives, not a single person existed who would stand up to save that girl who had done nothing wrong.

“...Fuck that,” Accelerator muttered.

He had come that far in order to fight that unfairness. Because of some plan someone had put together, Last Order was on the verge of destruction. In order to save her, in order to oppose that cruel fate, Accelerator had abandoned his position and his pride to come to Russia.

Go to Russia.

Aiwass, a ridiculously strong existence that had utterly defeated him, had said that. The being had said that he might be able to save Last Order’s life if he managed to acquire something there.

Accelerator had no idea what he was supposed to find.

In fact, he wasn’t even sure he could trust what Aiwass had said.

But…

(I’ll do it.)

Accelerator silently made up his mind.

(Either way, I know sitting still in Academy City won’t save her. That means I have to find another way. This has nothing to do with what Aiwass said.)

Accelerator was Academy City’s #1 Level 5 and Last Order was a special clone who stood at the center of Academy City’s plan. It was possible Russia would see them as something like powerful strategic weapons or important military bases. However, he didn’t care. He didn’t especially like being seen as a pawn of that rotten city, but he didn’t need to correct everyone who was mistaken. He only had one goal and he would continue on while destroying everyone and everything that stood in his way.

That was when he heard a noise from directly above.

It was the sound of thick metal being dented in.

Most likely, the freight train container had been bent by something. Accelerator looked up and the same sound came twice more.

It wasn’t just coming from that one car.

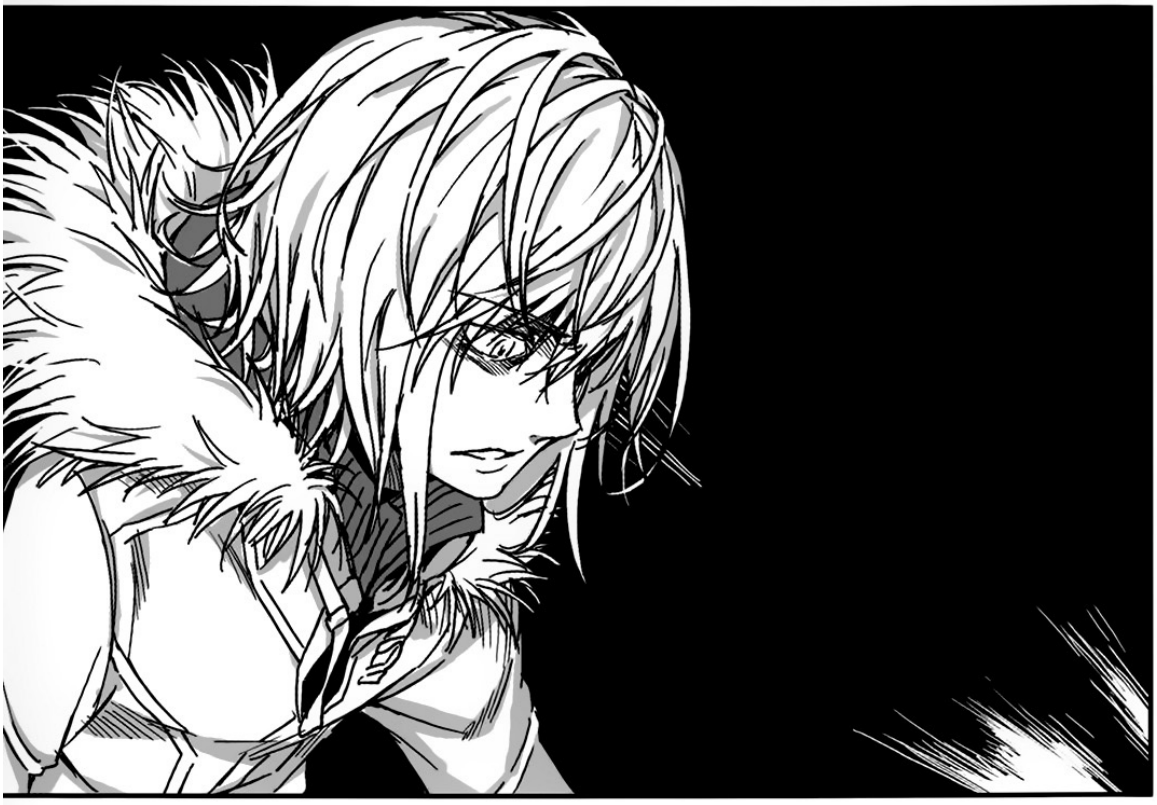
That odd sound that couldn’t be drowned out by the sound of the train racing along continued to come from various parts of the train. And it wasn’t always the ceiling. It also came from the walls and below the floor.

At the same time, he heard someone yelling in Russian accompanied by numerous gunshots.

The yelling quickly turned to screams.

Accelerator deduced that someone had jumped onto the freight train while it moved at high speed.

And not many people could get onto a train moving along at over 500 kph.



It had to be Academy City.

(…So they've come after us.)

"What is it? says Misaka as Misaka asks about the situation," said the young girl.

Accelerator slowly looked down at Last Order who lay on the floor. The #1 pulled a handkerchief form her pocket, folded it a bit, and placed it over her eyes.

He did not want her to see a blood-stained world.

"…It's nothing."

As he spoke, Accelerator reached up to the electrode around his neck.

The switch that allowed him to wield the power of the Academy City's strongest monster was there.

"You aren't going to fight again like before, right? says Misaka as Misaka makes sure."

"…I won't. I promise," he lied to the girl.

Normally, Last Order would have been able to forcibly cut off his connection to the Misaka Network taking all his powers from him. However, she did not do that. It may have been because she was not even able to do that in her current state.

For just a bit, Accelerator looked down at Last Order's face with the handkerchief over her eyes.

Finally, he silently stood up.

He stood up in order to utterly destroy all those who would threaten that small girl's life.

Immediately afterwards, Accelerator's slender body broke straight through the steel roof and landed on the train's roof.

When the attackers saw Accelerator appear from a crack like in broken plastic,

they moved back a bit.

They were white powered suits.

About 10 soldiers stood there wearing identical suits.

The upper body was surprisingly slim while the legs were exceedingly thick. They were likely special models create solely for speed. They had everything necessary built in so that they could move at high speed, maintain their balance, and soften the shock from impacts.

There were many different kinds of powered suits. There were kinds used for work, kinds used for rescue operations, and kinds used for military operations like the invasion of Avignon. It seemed some of those last types had entered Russia for World War III, but these ones were clearly different. They gave the impression that no money had been spared on their development and maintenance to ensure the maximum performance. The higher ups that had dispatched the attackers must have really wanted them to succeed in their mission.

Accelerator did not waver despite being surrounded by guns.

His glowing red eyes looked around the area and then muttered a few words under his breath.

“…Fucking trash. It’s best not to piss me off.”

A Russian soldier trembled in fear.

He had not gone through any kind of harsh training so he could fight on the front lines. He specialized in supplies and was only supposed to ensure that the necessary war material made it to its destination. However, he was still a soldier. Normally, his spirit was not so weak as to get that scared at having a gun pointed at him.

However, what was before him now was in another dimension entirely.

Those repulsive white machine soldiers had suddenly jumped onto the freight

train.

And then some strange monster with white hair and red eyes had started destroying them in a single strike.

The monster had broken through the roof, blown through a wall, caused an explosive wind through the opening, and kicked a few of the machine soldiers out. He had used his human arms and legs to tear through the 5 cm thick steel container like it was made of paper. Those simply weren't things a normal person could do. The soldier knew that Japan's Academy City was scientifically developing espers, but seeing it with his own eyes was something else entirely.

"Tch. Looks like that isn't enough to kill them," the monster said while staring outside.

He had kicked people out of a train moving at over 500 kph and that was what he said. Both sides in that fight were monsters.

The monster looked around the area.

Immediately afterwards, a giant machine soldier broke through the wall between cars. It appeared right to the side of the monster. However, the white monster did not seem worried. He merely swung one arm slightly blowing the machine soldier away along with the wreckage of what used to be its armor.

Something the machine soldier had been holding landed at the monster's feet.

It was most likely the item the machine soldier had stolen.

It was a duralumin trunk. The remains of handcuffs were attached to its handle. The handcuffs had originally been attached to the wrists of the Russian soldier, but the machine soldier had torn the chain apart with its fingertips.

The monster headed for the trunk, but the Russian soldier didn't stop him.

If the monster's attention turned in his direction, he was dead.

It was like being thrown into a small cage with a carnivore.

The trunk was locked, but the monster opened it as easily as opening his own

wallet. He had simply broken the lock open with sheer force.

“…What the hell?” he muttered.

The Russian soldier had not been informed what lay inside. What the monster found inside was a few dozen sheets of parchment. They had what looked like eerie spells or magic circles written on them in old ink.

It was just a bunch of nonsense.

Some people held vague senses of expectations or uneasiness towards good luck charms, but did anyone really think a demon would appear in a physical form to carry out the effects of those charms? What would people think if someone seriously said a series of killings had been done by a demon?

But…

The soldier doubted his superiors would have asked him to handcuff that trunk to himself if it was pointless. And those Academy City machine soldiers had shown up for the trunk.

The Russian soldier wasn’t sure what to make of the situation.

Had his superiors used it as a diversionary tactic and Academy City had fallen for it?

Or were those pieces of parchment in the trunk actually valuable enough that it was worth it for Academy City to send special forces after them?

“...Interesting,” muttered the monster.

The sublime smile that appeared on the monster’s face seemed to indicate the parchment’s abnormality more than anything.

“So this was a mission on the same level as recovering me, Academy City’s strongest Level 5? I don’t really see the point behind this, but it might be connected to the ‘different set of laws’ that fucker mentioned.”

Part 3

And Kamijou Touma was also in Russia.

It was only the end of October, but the area was already completely covered in white snow. The couple of centimeters of snow weren't enough to completely paralyze the transportation services, but he was walking in his basketball shoe-covered feet. The snow melted into cold water that penetrated his shoes torturing his toes with a stinging pain from the cold.

He was wearing his school uniform. He usually thought of it as inconvenient, but he was now admiring the range of environments it could work in. Of course, that was probably because it was using the textile technology of Academy City. He still would have liked to have a coat, but it was hardly the time to complain.

War.

Just hearing that word suddenly didn't give him a proper idea of what was going on. According to Queen Elizard of England, the war had occurred in an "unusual" way from what she could see of the international situation. The fact that it was highly likely that the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church had a hidden connection meant that Fiamma of the Right was likely pulling the strings behind the scenes.

But was that really all there was to it?

If there was only that simple reason, he could just stick to fixing that.

But didn't Academy City respond readily with military force? Didn't the city send a large number of forces and unmanned weapons into Russia as soon as the war began as if they had been preparing for this for years?

Was something happening behind the scenes there, too?

Kamijou stood quite near the center of that war, but he was only a high school student, so he couldn't grasp what was going on behind it all.

However, if he could end the war at least temporarily by stopping Fiamma, he knew what he had to do. And Kamijou also had an exceedingly personal reason to fight towards stopping Fiamma's plan.

There was a girl called Index.

She had memorized 103,000 grimoires, but was a completely normal girl otherwise. And there was someone after her vast knowledge.

Fiamma of the Right.

He had stolen a spiritual item from England that allowed him to remotely take knowledge from Index's head. By activating it, he had put a great load on Index's mind which had left her unconscious.

To save Index, Kamijou had to defeat Fiamma as quickly as possible and destroy the remote control spiritual item.

To do that, Kamijou had gone to Russia where Fiamma of the Right hid.

But…

"…Why is Lessar here?" Kamijou muttered dully.

Now, some of you may just have a blank look on your face upon hearing the name Lessar. Lessar was a girl from the British cabal reserve army of New Light. When Second Princess Carissa had used Curtana Original to start a coup d'etat, she had been one of the magicians who secretly excavated and transported Curtana.

She had white skin and was short. She looked like she might be in her early teens, and just the ends of her long black hair were braided. She was wearing what looked like a lacrosse uniform with a jacket, but what caught the eye first was the tail stretching from the area of her butt. The tail looked like a flat chain running through a transparent tube and it had something like an arrowhead on the end, so it gave a bit of a devilish feel to her. When they had met before, they had been enemies.

Kamijou had felt they had solved everything with no ill feelings after the coup d'etat, but he still didn't think she was the kind of person who would rush off to

Russia like that.

In response to Kamijou's question, Lessar's tail swished back and forth lightly.

"Hmm? I'm not here because I was ordered to come by the British Royal Family, because I have a grudge against Fiamma of the Right, because I want to become a member of the Kamijou Faction, or anything else like that," she responded in an exceedingly halfhearted way. "I was just thinking that it would be good if we give you some help since you dying here would be disadvantageous to the United Kingdom as a whole. …Actually, maybe I shouldn't go so far as to say 'we'. Bayloupe may end up grabbing my ass again…"

Lessar seemed to start talking to herself in the middle of her response. Kamijou had sensed it a bit during their first meeting, but he had a good feeling now that that girl had very self-centered thought patterns.

Without realizing what Kamijou was thinking, a mischievous smile appeared on her youthful face.

"Well, you can just say that I'm using you and helping you. If you think of it as having a professional magician's strength at your disposal, it's not a bad deal, right?"

"Lessar…are you even all that powerful? All I remember you doing was running around London at night with some strange case."

"Do you want me to kick your ass and show you? Necessarius can't help you, right? So I should be a lot of help. Oh, and I'm better than Bayloupe when it comes to simply using the steel glove. As long as she doesn't use the Gjallarhorn, I won't lose to her. …Although, I can't exactly complain about that if it were a real battle," Lessar added. "And!! My steel glove has been powered up!! Tah dah!! It's the Lessar Special Custom! Something like a red laser comes shooting out allowing the blade 'fingers' to grab things at a distant that it isn't actually touching when I swing it around!!"

"…I didn't ask for your help."

"You really don't think I can help, do you? Was I overshadowed by the impression left by the rest of the coup d'etat…?" Lessar muttered before seeming to switch back to showing off how she could be helpful. "And it'll make

things a lot easier to have someone who can translate Russian for you, right?”

“And another thing, how did you know I was sneaking into Russia?”

After the coup d’etat, he had pretty much only told Elizard and Stiyl that he was heading to Russia, but he hadn’t told them how or exactly when. And yet Lessar had still managed to hunt him down.

He felt a little pathetic for running into a comrade right after sneaking into Russia alone without telling anyone. It may not have been the time to worry about something like that, but he still felt that way.

Then Lessar seemed to notice Kamijou’s troubled expression.

“Hah hahhn. Are you thinking you shouldn’t do this to Index who is sleeping in a London cathedral? After all, you say you’re heading off to save her, but then you meet up with some other girl right away.”

“Gh…!?”

“Then I have some good news for you. I may have a tail coming out from my skirt, but I’m not wearing spats down below. I’m only wearing panties under there.”

“How the hell is telling me that supposed to help!?”

“Circle behind me!! Flip it up!! And forget all about the girls of the past!!”

“Y’know, I really should punch you for that one!!” Kamijou yelled with veins bulging at his temple.

However, Lessar just asked him a carefree question with her tail waving about as if she were completely willing to show him her panties.

“So how were you planning on finding Fiamma of the Right here in Russia?” She said in a tone that implied she thought he didn’t have a plan at all. “Russia is quite large. It stretches almost all the way across the continent of Eurasia from east to west. Countries with a 9 hour time difference within them aren’t exactly common. It’s a little too big to just run across a specific person by chance.”

“That’s what you’d think, isn’t it?”

“?”

Lessar stared blankly at that unexpected response.

“How many magicians do you think I’ve fought now? I’ve gotten a bit of an idea of how you all do things by this point.”

Part 4

The Strait of Dover was a 30 kilometer strait between England and France.

Throughout history, it had become an important point whenever the relationship between the two countries soured. That area of the ocean had a bloody history and it was now about to absorb more blood and lives.

“The deployment of a mixed team containing both Anglicans and knights is complete.”

Kanzaki Kaori nodded silently in response to the voice.

They were not standing on land. They were on a boat. Large 100 meter long sailing vessels made of wood flooded into the area seeming to completely cover the sea. All of the ships had been reinforced magically making them tougher than a battleship and quick moving.

It was an odd sight.

However, the truly odd part was not the great number of ships.

It was the fact that the war between magicians had developed to that level.

“The era truly has changed,” said Agnese Sanctis who was standing next to Kanzaki.

The short girl looked off into the distance with her hand above her eyebrows like she was giving a clumsy salute.

“It seems the coup d’etat in England is being called British Halloween. Just like Nessie or the Nazca Lines, it’s being treated like one of the 7 mysteries of the world or something. Humans sure are tough. Even when faced with something they can’t comprehend, they just end up accepting it.”

“Yes, it seems no one has realized that it was actually magic,” said Kanzaki with a sigh. “But they had a vague idea that Japan’s Academy City is scientifically developing ‘mystical powers’. It’s an entirely different system, but it gave them a bit of a resistance. Because they knew that kind of thing actually existed somewhere in the world, it was easier to accept that something similar could exist nearby them.”

As she spoke, something seemed to catch in the back of Kanzaki’s throat. Knowledge of the science side had helped stabilize the magic side. That also meant that, without that knowledge, a more serious panic could have occurred. Kanzaki became wary of “something” that had made its way inside her thinking without her knowing.

“At any rate,” Kanzaki said changing the subject, “if they get through here, they have a straight shot for London. I want to avoid a battle as much as possible, but we have to defend ourselves if the French forces attack.”

“It’s almost 100% certain that they’re coming, though,” scornfully said the short nun who led an entire unit. “England and France have been in a dangerously tense situation since before the coup d’etat. …And annoyingly enough, it’s thanks to their backing by the higher ups of the Roman Catholic Church. With that foundation, World War III is likely to spread here. And glimpses of the Roman Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Church can clearly be seen in the background of it all. I don’t see how France won’t attack England with things the way they are. The only question is whether they will attack as the vanguard of the Roman Catholic Church or they will attack simply to put an end to the historical and magical antagonism between the two countries.”

After Agnese finished speaking, a transmission came in from Agata, one of the

nuns in her unit.

“Interference from France has been confirmed!! They’re coming, so stay on your guard!!”

The Strait of Dover usually perpetually created waves but the ocean then gathered together from the French border. Like ice had spread out instantly, the ocean water solidified.

“Salt!?”

“Tch. They’ve created footholds for themselves and robbed our ships of maneuverability all at once!!”

Shadows shot along like arrows.

There weren’t just one or two of them.

Over 1000 magicians headed from the French border towards Kanzaki and the others by running straight across the white and hardened ocean surface. At that rate, the British side would be killed. They would be crushed like a beached killer whale being eaten by a flock of crows.

Without the use of the ships, over half of the strategy Kanzaki and the others had planned was useless.

However, that did not stop them.

Starting with Kanzaki, the Amakusas who specialized in hand to hand combat jumped down from the ships in order to intercept the French magicians.

Then Kanzaki noticed something odd at her feet.

“!?”

She hurriedly jumped to the side.

A hole opened in the area of the salt land she had been standing on. If she had been an instant slower, she would have fallen into the sea. Then they would have concentrated their attacks on her while she couldn’t move properly.

(They were already an enemy that we needed to go all out on, and now this…!?)

They were at the disadvantage by being stuck on top of the unmoving ships.

But if they jumped down onto the salt land, the enemy would seize the initiative and attack.

Whatever they did, they were in a bad position.

People who were seriously waging war were not supposed to allow the enemy to create a situation where they had the advantage.

And then…

“You can’t let something like that stop you. I thought you were supposed to be the force protecting England!” said an intimidating female voice.

Immediately afterwards, a thin film appeared atop the salt land like an extra coating. That time, it had not been France’s doing. The phenomenon spread all the way across the ocean at once as if it were invading France from England.

They now had a proper foothold.

Kanzaki strongly stepped down and she used her sword’s scabbard to blow away more than 20 French magicians at once.

As she did, she looked over in the direction the female voice had come from.

Standing there was the country’s second princess wearing a red dress.

Part 5

Fiamma of the Right was the leader of the secret Roman Catholic organization God's Right Seat. Normally, he would have bossed around all of the various groups in that church that was said to number 2 billion across the world.

However, the other members of God's Right Seat—Vento of the Front, Terra of the Left, and Acqua of the Back—had all either been defeated or had left the organization of their own free will.

What had Fiamma used to make up for the loss of power their loss had created?

What part of the Roman-Russian alliance had he used?

"The answer I came up with is the Russian army," said Kamijou as he walked along the snow. "Of course, Fiamma doesn't see them as comrades. They may be nothing more than something like a breakwater used to buy time and ensure nothing gets in the way of his plan. But he will use anything he can. To move freely throughout Russia, it is much more natural to think it will be easier to use those already in Russia than using a Roman Catholic organization. I should be able to see glimpses of Fiamma in the movements of the Russian army. If I follow anything out of place I see there, I can find him."

"Fiamma came to Russia to find Sasha Kreutzev, right?"

"Yes, but I don't know why," said Kamijou simply raising the white flag at Lessar's question. "But if that's really all he needs, then he wouldn't have a reason to come here himself."

"Eh?"

"He could easily just order the Russian military and the Russian Orthodox Church to search over the area for her. All Fiamma would have to do is sit in an easy chair in front of a fireplace and wait for the result. But that isn't what he did."

"So there's…something else?"

"Yes, there's something that Fiamma has to do himself."

As Kamijou spoke, Lessar looked at the side of his face.

She couldn’t figure out if he was an idiot or actually smart.

It was probably an issue of what field he specialized in. Like a jigsaw puzzle, various limited circumstances had to be met for the workings of that boy’s head to get going. Someone good at video games may have excellent reflexes and kinetic vision, but they couldn’t just use those skills in a different field like martial arts. It was something like that.

Most likely, the girl sleeping in a London cathedral was a piece of the puzzle for him.

“But Russia is in the middle of World War III. The military has to be moving all over the country. I doubt the Russian military expected China and India to side with Academy City. I bet they’re frantically sending troops in that direction right now. Can you really find the actions related to Fiamma amid all that chaos?”

“Fiamma is sure to be trying to hide his plan,” responded Kamijou. “He’s using the Russian army while keeping that fact a secret from them. We need to be suspicious of any kind of operation with a plausible reason behind it but shows a completely different meaning when you look at it in a different way like it’s some kind of trompe l’œil. …For example, an operation that shows an odd chemical reaction when you add in the term ‘magic’.”

“And that’s why you’re here?”

“I wouldn’t have come all the way out here for any other reason.”

Kamijou looked out across the scenery of white snow and muttered a few words.

“…Wait for me.”

Part 6

The Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations was made up of groups that had opposed Russia's way of doing things. They had a common currency like the EU and a passport was not needed for people or goods to travel between them.

Russia had viewed them as a nuisance and had been planning to invade the alliance once they had a reason even before the war. And now they had a chance to do so in the confusion of the war.

"It seems the Russian army is trying to build up a base near the border," said Lessar who must have gathered information from the nearby residents beforehand. "The basic configuration they're using includes vehicles with a missile launcher and a howitzer on them. It looks like they're planning on tossing explosives into the Elizalina Alliance borders from a distance of 30 or 40 kilometers."

A radius of 40 kilometers was bigger than Academy City and the armored vehicles would be deployed around the base to double or even triple their effective attack range.

Of course, this was a war, so it wouldn't end after just one or two shots. Once the base was complete, they would likely be able to send a thousand or two thousand deadly shots flying through the air.

"But that isn't the true purpose behind it."

"…"

"If they truly wanted to bomb them, they would just have the air force use some ground-attack aircraft or bombers. That way, it wouldn't really matter how far away they were. They could turn the entire country into a sea of flames all at once. …They're trying to trick people with the immediate specs. There is no real need to build this base."

Suddenly, a high pitched roar traveled over Kamijou and Lessar's heads. It wasn't just the sound of a passenger plane. It was the distinctive roar of supersonic travel.

However, it was not the sound of a Russian Air Force aircraft.

It was quite the opposite. One of Academy City's supersonic bombers was slicing through the sky above Russia. But it was not on its way to turn some city to rubble. Apparently, it was bringing in some of the materiel and weapons needed for a base that had been constructed directly within Russia.

Usually, airborne troops were not used that way.

It was true that landing in the middle of enemy territory and constructing a fortress would be advantageous, but that was only if that fortress could be maintained. If you couldn't ensure an above ground route to transport a large amount of materiel on, the fortress would end up being isolated.

However, Academy City overcame that problem with sheer force.

Their supersonic bombers could travel through the air at over 7000 kph. Those monstrous planes could easily fly right over Russia's anti-aircraft network and shake off intercepting fighters using overwhelming speed. A large amount of materiel could be supplied to the fortress quickly and reliably using them. Thanks to that, the large country of Russia was already dotted with quickly constructed Academy City fortresses.

"Amazing," said Lessar in a somehow carefree voice as she looked up at that technology from the distant world of science. "Did you hear Academy City's response to Russia's proclamation of war? Apparently, they said there was no real reason to fight, but that they weren't sure if it was right to stand by doing nothing when they could stop it. When it comes down to a simple comparison of military power, they must be way out ahead."

"…Wouldn't Russia want to shoot down one of those because of all the weapons on it that give Academy City that advantage?" said Kamijou after a thinking about what Lessar had said.

He looked up at the military planes that continued flying by every 20 or 30 minutes.

"From the engine noise alone, even a dog or a cat could figure out that this is a major passageway. Yet this base only has land-based weapons. It doesn't have a single runway for fighters. In fact, I haven't seen many Russian fighters at all. Something just seems wrong."

Was it Kamijou's experience with the science side that allowed him to be so sure of that?

Lessar was an expert at battle, but she lost that authority when it came to the actions of a scientific military.

"How did you figure this out?"

"From a map," Kamijou said pulling out a folded paper map similar to the ones sold anywhere.

Lessar frowned.

"You can figure all this out just by looking at a map?"

"No. I'm not a professional soldier or anything. I can't deduce what's going on behind the scenes just by seeing the formation of the army." Kamijou lightly shook the folded map around. "If they were truly carrying out an important military operation, they wouldn't be selling this map. They've already made sure maps of a few areas aren't being sold, but there was no restriction put on this area. That's especially odd given how large the base is. They don't want the area to seem important, so they've purposefully left the security low. However, that made it stand out."

"Ah," said Lessar either in admiration or just giving an arbitrary response. "So is Fiamma in that base?"

"I'm not even convinced there's actually a base there."

"But the Russian army is stationed there, right? How are we going to get in?"

"Well…"

Kamijou trailed off as the sound of engines became audible in the distance. They sounded deeper than a normal vehicle. They must have belonged to large trucks.

They could see a group of large vehicles travelling along the white snow plains. Kamijou wasn't sure exactly what kind of trucks they were, but they were reinforced with heavy-looking metal at various points and they had a military feel to them.

If that had been all, it wouldn’t have been too odd a sight in a country at war.

However, there was something else that was clearly odd.

At both the front and back of the line of trucks was a carriage pulled by two horses. The horses were made of silver metal. They weren’t wearing some sort of armor; they truly were horses made of metal.

The carriages were not made completely of wood and cloth. Instead, they seemed to be covered in an outer shell that looked like Western armor.

They were heading from the direction of the base Kamijou and Lessar were headed towards.

This time Kamijou frowned.

“What are those?”

“Oh, has your precious knowledge of the science side run out?”

“I’m not talking about the trucks. Those odd horses are clearly not scientific. Or are you saying the Russian army independently developed pet horse robots?”

“Hmm. I’d say they’re Russian Orthodox Sleipnirs. I’ve heard they were created to help cross snowy plains.”

“…So our opponents here really are magicians.”

“Yes, the trucks were probably just borrowed from the army. Magicians might not know much about cutting edge scientific technology, but they can still drive.”

Kamijou tried to follow Lessar’s lead and lay down to hide on the snow, but the cold stabbed into him right through his non-waterproof clothes causing him to hurriedly stand right back up again.

“If you take unnatural half-assed methods like that, it just makes you look more suspicious,” Lessar said with an exasperated expression.

“I know, I know,” Kamijou responded blowing out white puffs of air. “You said

they’re from the Russian Orthodox Church, but what’s in those trucks? Are they full of spiritual items needed for war or something?”

He hadn’t asked that question expecting her to know the answer, but Lessar gave him one he certainly hadn’t expected.

“It’s probably the villagers.”

“?”

Lessar grabbed the map from Kamijou and pointed towards the general area of the “suspicious base”.

“The official story is that they hastily put together a base to attack the Elizalina Alliance from, right? Well, there were probably people living there before the base was made.”

“…”

Kamijou’s shoulders jumped slightly.

Whether she noticed that or not, Lessar continued on in a carefree way.

“And if that line of trucks being guarded by the Sleipnir carriages just continues on past us, it will reach a concentration camp for political prisoners. I don’t know what pretext they’re officially being taken there on, but the Russian Orthodox Church must not care about the villager’s lives to rob them of their homes like this. They may have just forced everyone out of all the villages in the area in order to use the secretly constructed base.”

“How many villages are there?” Kamijou asked peering at the map from the side. “How many villages were already in the planned area for the base?”

“There were around 8 villages with 20 or 30 people in each. It seems this area is mostly wilderness because it wasn’t developed much. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth, but they could probably fit all of the villagers in those truc—Wait, where are you going?”

Lessar yelled out to Kamijou as he suddenly ran off.

He was headed for a nearby log house. With almost nothing between it and the horizon in every direction, the mountain hut may have functioned as a rest area.

For some reason, a four-wheel drive vehicle was parked outside the empty log house. From the symbols on the side, it seemed to belong to the Russian army. Kamijou guessed that the army may have been using the log house as a lookout or surveillance area.

He approached the vehicle, didn't hesitate to use his elbow to break the window, and unlocked the door from inside.

Lessar did not draw back upon hearing the loud sound of breaking glass.

Instead, she sighed.

"Why are you taking out the tool box? Don't tell me you're trying to save the villagers with just that crowbar."

"We don't know how many enemies there are or what kind of magic they're using. That isn't a situation where we can just charge in and assume we'll manage somehow. I don't ever charge into a dangerous situation because I want to."

Lessar pressed her index fingers against her temple at the fact that Kamijou did not deny his intention to rescue the villagers. She had sensed it a bit during the coup d'etat in London, but she was sure now that the boy had a screw loose in his head somewhere.

(…But that's why it looks like there's a real chance of enticing him into working for the UK. Hee hee.)

As Lessar secretly confirmed her goal, Kamijou stuck the L-shaped crowbar into the snow. He pulled a strong nylon string from the toolbox and tied it to the crowbar sticking from the snow while glancing down at his cell phone which was displaying an analog clock face.

"?"

He pounded an iron stake into the ground at a bit of a distance and tied a string to it as well. Seeing him pull the string out tight, Lessar frowned.

(…He’s making a measurement?)

That thought came to her mind because she knew how to make accurate measurements for the size of different parts of the magic circles needed for large magical rituals.

“What are you doing?”

“You can’t tell? I’m measuring the direction. Well, technically, I’m measuring a flight path.”

Kamijou stuck a few more stakes into the snow and spread strings out near the ground.

“Oh, so you weren’t just heading out there to try to fight with that crowbar.”

“Not even I’m that stupid. How many escorts do you think those trucks have? I’m not about to pick a fight with a group of professional magicians. They’re experts at killing. Do you think I’m a character from a shounen manga or something? I can’t win against that many opponents. …My right hand may have a special power, but it isn’t much help when I’m overwhelmed by numbers.”

“Then what are you planning to do?”

“Let me just check: That Russian Orthodox group doesn’t care about the lives of the villagers, right?”

“If they did, they wouldn’t be taking them to a concentration camp. You probably don’t have a good idea of what a place like that is since you’re from a peaceful country like Japan.”

For some reason Kamijou smiled.

“Good. Then this could work.”

“Again: what are you planning to do?”

“Nothing too tricky. I’m just going to use everything at my disposal.”

Kamijou finished laying out a few more strings and then pointed above his head.

Lessar looked up and saw a long, narrow contrail.

Part 7

Brassa P. Marhaisk frowned.

Brassa operated the small 8-wheeled carriage pulled by Sleipnirs at the front of the trucks transporting the prisoners. The carriage looked like a pill bug with silver metal plates covering it like armor. However, he was not frowning out of displeasure. All the drivers of the armored vehicles had a similar expression as they stared out the long narrow horizontal slit of a window that only allowed them to see forward . It was the same for the magical vehicles and the scientific ones.

All he could see was a white snowy plain.

There was little difference between the asphalt and the dirt.

At first glance, it looked as if one could just ignore the road and head along whatever path one wanted, but that was not actually true. The problem was the snow. It was impossible to tell how deep it was just from the surface. You also couldn’t tell if any thick trees were fallen and buried underneath it.

Carelessly hitting something like that would break the 8-legged horse spiritual item, and he wanted to avoid that. Also, Russia was a vast country. Its urban areas were some of the most developed in the world, but in the places where there was nothing, there truly was nothing. Being stranded there would be as bad as being stranded in a desert.

It was the kind of place where a map would only tell you that there was nothing there. The maps hadn’t been updated in years, so you really couldn’t know what

was there. Straying from the small roads partially hidden in the snow was something you truly wanted to avoid. “How much longer to the detention facility?” said a bored voice in a transmission from one of the trucks.

Of course, it was sent by a magical spiritual item.

“We packed too many people in here, dammit. It’s a like a sauna in here.”

“Then open up the door for some ventilation. In about 10 seconds, you’ll be wishing you had that heat back,” Brassa replied to his fellow magician.

Then a high-pitched roar came from overhead.

It was one of Academy City’s supersonic bombers.

He was pretty sure they were called HsB-02s. According to a report he had read, they had turned the French city of Avignon into a sea of lava. They were apparently transporting goods instead of bombing, but he still couldn’t exactly remain calm with one passing by overhead.

“Dammit. Where’s the proper Russian army? Can’t they do something with surface-to-air missiles?” said the driver of the truck.

“They fly at 7000 kph. A missile can’t lock on and fire fast enough. It’s like they’re mocking the theory of aerial warfare.”

“What about the Migs or Sukhois? They can take on American stealth fighters, right?”

“I don’t know. My scientific knowledge isn’t too great.”

Brassa glared up at the large bomber in annoyance.

(Thank to John’s interception spell, the age of magicians flying came to an end. If it weren’t for that…)

If that airplane dropped a bomb then, Brassa and the others could be killed instantly. Having the bombers dropping small lightweight airborne tanks on parachutes was a problem, but Brassa felt more humiliated than relieved that the bomber wasn’t directly carrying out its normal job.

“(…Damn you. I know you can see us,)” he muttered under his breath.

Immediately afterwards, flames suddenly burst up on the route Brassa and the others were heading on.

“!?”

It was only about 300 meters ahead. Brassa hurriedly ordered the Sleipnirs pulling the armored carriage to stop. The entire convoy stopped on the road.

He thought there would be nothing but snow all the way to the horizon, but he saw a log house-like building that was likely there for anyone whose engine stalled or who ran into some other type of trouble. The explosion had occurred right next to that building. When he looked closely, he saw what looked like a four-wheel drive vehicle sitting there.

The explosion continued.

The log house itself was blown away. The sole manmade structure on the vast landscape was blown away.

It wasn’t just a normal explosion.

It ran across the ground in a straight line for over 3 kilometers. The white snow was blown up into the air instantly and the ground glowed orange. It was like the Russian earth was being torn apart and melted causing magma to spew forth.

“What!? Are they bombing!?”

Normally, Brassa would have been unable to respond to his companion’s question, but he had heard that Academy City’s supersonic bombers had cleanly cut the French city of Avignon off of the map. He had heard that they had weapons that used the air friction created by speeds of over 7000 kph to produce fearsome destructive force.

“So they’ve finally done it!!”

An unpleasant sweat started flowing from Brassa’s back. The convoy composed of trucks and armored carriages traveling along in the middle of nowhere were a convenient target when seen from the air. They had nowhere to hide and they

were clumped together enough to be easily locked onto with the radar.

“Hey, can you use a people clearing field or something to prevent them from targeting us?!”

“We don’t have to time to prepare something like that,” Brassa responded as he re-realized just how much danger he was in. “This is bad. We should get out. They’ll just continue bombing us until they hit us if we stay inside.”

“But they’re bombing us with some super weapon from Academy City!! If we get out, we’ll have nothing protecting us from the blast!!”

“You saw that destructive force just now, didn’t you!? With just the spiritual items we have on hand, the trucks and carriages will just be blown to pieces!! It’s better to make sure they can’t target us. If we spread out and hide ourselves on the snow with our white outfits, our odds of survival go way up!!”

“What about the villagers we’re transporting!?”

“Leave them.” Brassa grabbed his usual staff and headed for the exit to the carriage. “We’re just taking them to the concentration camp anyway. Who cares if they fall victim to the bombing here?!”

What Kamijou Touma had asked Lessar to do was actually quite simple.

“You said your steel glove had been improved, right? It can grab distant objects just by having a red laser-like thing touch them instead of the blade fingers, right?”

“What about it?”

Kamijou pointed up into the air in response to the girl’s question.

“Then can you grab that?”

“?”

She frowned, but still began to follow his instructions.

“Wait. I have one more request. Can you stab the steel glove into the ground and make it move from a distance?”

“…Why do I have to do something like that?”

“So you can’t?”

“No, I can,” said Lessar as she stabbed the steel glove upside down into the snow and moved back a few meters. She then sent a bit of magic power to the spiritual item causing it to “grab” a distant object.

That distant object was the supersonic bomber flying at over 7000 kph at an altitude of 10,000 m.

Immediately afterwards, the steel glove split the Russian ground in two as it was dragged by the supersonic bomber.

It was a simple issue of air friction.

By slicing through the lower altitude area with its higher concentration of air at over 7000 kph, a massive amount of energy was produced.

With a tremendous explosive noise, an orange line raced across the white land along the route of the supersonic bomber. It was roughly 3 kilometers long. The ground melted like magma and blew the white snow away. The steel glove must not have been able to withstand the friction partway through because the line of destruction ended shortly after the steel glove was torn to pieces.

Lessar was the one that was shocked by this.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!? M-m-my steel glove!! That was the one and only Lessar Special Custom!!”

“Good. It had a nice effect similar to what happened in Avignon. That might very well fool the Russian Orthodox magicians.”

The trucks and carriages that were protected by solid spells had been abandoned in the middle of the snowy plain. Kamijou could see that the group of strong magicians that a normal high school student couldn’t hope to take on had distanced themselves from the convoy on foot.

It probably wouldn’t have been as effective if they had just used some kind of explosive to emulate an aerial bombing. An amateur like Kamijou couldn’t tell the difference, but there were different types of bombs and those different types spread out differently and made different types of noises. For instance, someone may have been able to tell that a faked explosion using propane or gasoline was not an aerial bombing.

That type of bombardment using air friction was exclusive technology of Academy City. There was no analogous weapon in Russia.

That was why Kamijou had managed to trick them.

Whether they were professional magicians or tough soldiers, he could fool them at least once that way.

“If they were transporting guests they had to protect with their lives, that wouldn’t have worked so well. But they didn’t care about those villagers, so they were willing to just abandon them when it came down to it.”

“You seem to feel like you’ve accomplished something here, but that steel glove was mine!! How are you going to make up for destroying it!?”

“How much does a spiritual item cost anyway? Actually, do they even sell them?” Kamijou asked offhand as he ran towards the trucks about 300 meters away.

Lessar ran after him muttering something to herself.

Apparently, the residents of the villages in the area designated for the base were crammed into the trucks.

Kamijou circled around to the back of one of the trucks, but he didn’t know how to open the door. He shook the giant metal fixture, but it wouldn’t budge. Lessar had said Russian Orthodox magicians might have been transporting them, but the lock must not have been magical because nothing changed when he touched it with his right hand.

Lessar then reached her hand in from the side. With a surprisingly simple motion, she easily opened the truck door.

The men, women, and children cowering inside were all focusing on them.

They were panicked and confused.

They were afraid because they thought they had arrived at some decisively bad place and they were confused that the people opening the truck did not seem to be with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Kamijou started to say something to put their minds at ease, but he didn't know Russian. He thought about using gestures to get his point across, but he gave up on that idea. Instead, he whispered to Lessar.

"Can you tell them to help us because we're going let them escape?"

"What a pain," Lessar said bluntly. "I don't see how this action helps the UK."

Kamijou pointed out towards the snowy field as he responded.

"If we don't hurry, the Russian Orthodox magicians will realize something's wrong and come back."

"…"

Lessar looked grumpy, but she decided to do what he said. Seeing her face the people in the truck, Kamijou headed for another truck. The door was the same, but he managed to open it himself that time. Having to explain everything each time would be pointless work, so he used gestures to indicate that the people inside should head to where Lessar was.

"How are they going to get away?"

"They can just use the trucks. I'm sure there are people in that group who can drive. They can just head to a nearby town for now."

"…Well, I guess that's fine. But there isn't very much in the way of concealment spells cast on these things. They look like Russian army trucks, so we'd better hope they don't get attacked by any Academy City tanks."

"We'll take the front carriage. The one covered in metal panels that looks a bit like a pill bug." Kamijou looked over towards the small carriage. "It's the

hardest to see the faces of those inside of it from the outside. I'm clearly Asian and you…well, I can't really tell, but I'm betting there's a noticeable difference between British and Russian faces. It probably wouldn't be good if we were spotted. That armored carriage will be best to head towards that base in…but there's still one problem. Can I ask for your advice?"

"Don't tell me you don't know how to drive a carriage."

"Hey, I'd like to see a high school student that *does* know how to drive a carriage in this day and age."

"Yeah, well I'm a middle school student," Lessar said as she headed for the armored carriage.

She seemed fairly confident. Kamijou started to head after her, but someone suddenly grabbed at the edge of his clothes.

He turned around to find a small girl.

She seemed to be trying to say something, but she also seemed to realize that she and Kamijou spoke two completely different languages.

Kamijou gently removed the girl's small hand from his clothes and started to speak to her in Japanese not worrying about whether she would understand him.

But he never got a single word out.

A woman holding a baby who seemed to be the girl's mother frantically grabbed the girl's arm and pulled her away from Kamijou. He couldn't understand what the girl's mother was saying, but there was hostility and fear in her gaze.

(…This is World War III. Academy City and therefore the Japanese are Russia's enemy.)

He felt a prickle of pain at that, but he just spoke in Japanese without showing it on his face.

"If I'm ever in a similar pinch, you can just repay me then. So don't worry about it."

Something like a small horn sounded from the armored carriage. Kamijou admired how it sounded just like a normal car horn as he ran towards the carriage.

Part 8

It was not exactly what one would call pleasant within the armored carriage. It had an air conditioning-like spiritual item that regulated the temperature inside, so it wasn’t cold, but the carriage was filled with the stench of sweat. The thick steel enclosing them within and preventing them from seeing outside gave an odd sense of being trapped.

Lessar was sitting in the seat for the driver within the armored carriage that was currently not moving. Not even that seat was exposed. It was completely surrounded by the metal panels as well. The reins that connected to the metal horses known as Sleipnir stretched out through a slit.

“Wow, I thought it would be hot in here, but this is ridiculous.”

“…The settings for this air conditioner-like thing are just too broad. If we set it just a bit colder, I’m betting it would suddenly get very cold in here. And if I touch it with my right hand, I’ll destroy it.”

“Sigh. I can’t stand it. I’m gonna undo the buttons on my shirt and fan myself with my skirt.”

“Bfh!! What are you-!? Why are you doing that all of a sudden!?”

“I’m seducing you, so react already!! If you push me down and get this over with, the UK will have one more vanguard member!!”

“Hah hahhn!! I see. So you’re just one of those girls that says all sorts of things with a smile on her face while not knowing the meaning of any of the sexual terms she’s using!! As someone who has just a bit more experience with life, let me tell you that you’re saying some truly dangerous things!! You should be more careful!!”

(You fool, I’ve got you now!!)

The little devil girl that was Lessar lightly swished the tail coming from her miniskirt and grabbed at an opening for a counterattack with an evil smile on her face.

“Okay, understood!! Then I’ll show you exactly how serious I am!!”

Part 9

And on the battlefield on the Strait of Dover, the Amakusa girl named Itsuwa felt a chill run down her back as she held her spear in both hands.

“H-hawahhh!?”

“!? Wh-what is it, Itsuwa?”

Itsuwa hesitantly averted her gaze from Tatemiya Saiji who had been surprised by her odd exclamation.

“N-nothing… I just…have a bad feeling about something…”

Part 10

Of course, nothing happened that a more late-blooming girl would be afraid would happen. Instead, Lessar was holding the reins to the Sleipnirs and driving the armored carriage looking unhappy.

“I was a little nervous about using the Russian metal horses, but it’s basically the same as a normal carriage.”

“What do you mean by a normal carriage…?”

Because they were riding in a Russian Orthodox carriage, they had been able to reduce the amount of suspicion directed towards them. However, Kamijou doubted they would be able to just get onto the grounds of that heavily guarded fortress with it.

After Lessar drove the armored carriage for about half an hour, she stopped it in the middle of the empty field of snow.

“We’re going to reach the fortress’s defensive lines before long. To put it bluntly, we’ll be on the receiving end of missile launchers and howitzers if we continue on like this. I doubt the defensive spiritual items installed on the carriage can stand up to that.”

“But there are a lot of tracks through the snow that look like they came from a vehicle of a similar size. Well, I guess it can’t all be easy. Just knowing that the base is bringing in similar carriages is enough. That tells us it really isn’t a normal military installation.”

“What do you mean by a normal military installation…?”

The fortress itself was only about 10 kilometers in each direction. It was said to be front line base adjacent to the border with the Elizalina Alliance, but it wasn’t operating as one would expect for such a base. Part of Fiamma’s plan had to be hidden there.

A defensive line was set up at a radius of 40 kilometers around the fortress.

Of course, it wasn’t surrounded by huge walls like the Great Wall of China. Guard towers had been set up on each side of the fortress and a great number of shells would be fired on any suspicious figure that was spotted.

“…So they evacuated everyone living in an area even greater than Academy City.”

“Yes, but this area is mostly wilderness, so that didn’t even amount to the population of a single Japanese village.”

That reminded Kamijou of just how vast the country of Russia was. On an island nation like Japan, you simply couldn’t find such a large area of untouched nature.

“So what do we do now?” asked Lessar from the driver’s seat. “If we set foot within the defensive line like this, we’ll definitely be blown up by missiles or torn to pieces by bullets. We can’t avoid that kind of thing with the speed of the carriage. Don’t you need some sort of plan? Oh, and I highly doubt they’ve left a blind spot for us to sneak in through.”

“Actually, they might have,” said Kamijou in response to Lessar’s comment that

had been said in a half challenging way. “Like I said before, Fiamma is using the Russian army, but he isn’t going to tell them the details of his magical plan. He probably just fooled them into thinking there was a just cause for World War III. If so, he needs to have a secret route he can use to bring in magical equipment and materials.”

“So you’re saying we can sneak into the fortress as long as we find that?”

“Most of the Russians don’t know about magic. At the very least, I doubt the normal soldiers can fight using magic. It should be easier than breaking in through the front.”

“…Fiamma of the Right is pretty powerful, right? I mean, he is said to be the leader of God’s Right Seat. The magical traps and subordinates he’s prepared will probably be rather high level.”

“And that’s where I finally come in.”

Kamijou smiled and waved his right hand around.

That hand held a power known as Imagine Breaker that could negate every kind of supernatural power.

“A fight against a professional soldier armed with a rifle and bombs isn’t the type of battle I should be fighting. Nor is a battle against a large group of Russian Orthodox magicians. I had just been thinking that things weren’t going as well as usual for me, but here’s where it starts. I’ve finally arrived at the stage that’s made for me.”

Kamijou Touma stared straight ahead through the slit-like window in the armored carriage.

He muttered a few words as he faced the slight silhouette on the horizon that belonged to the facility he was headed for.

“…I’ll be there soon, Fiamma.”

Part 11

Deep in Moscow stood an old man wearing an extravagant military uniform that a soldier on the battlefield would certainly not be wearing. He was within a building that was like a palace, but it was actually a fortress registered as an official military facility. The man's uniform was covered with military decorations. Until a moment ago, he had believed that he had been in the very depths of Russia's darkness. However, that was apparently not true.

Other men wearing similar uniforms were also gathered there.

Those men were similar in ways other than their clothing and careers.

"…The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, huh? It seems the world has spread quite a bit in an unexpected direction."

"We started this war as they wanted, but can we really push back Academy City's forces?"

"There are a surprising number of people aiding Academy City. The blessings of scientific technology have certainly carved out a large line."

"Essentially, this has developed into a war between those under the control of the Roman Catholic or the Russian Orthodox churches and the rest of the world. It really hurt not to get India and China's help."

"I can't tell what Academy City is after. Adding in those unmanned weapons and showing off how much military strength they have isn't a plus for them."

"You're saying they have a goal beyond interception and defense?"

"Maybe it's the missile silos?"

"We can't allow the silos to be taken no matter what. With their technology, it's possible they could activate them without a proper signal. It's also possible they could bring in some of their own."

“Which means…?”

“I’m suggesting we think about activating you know what.”

All of them fell silent at that.

They had gone through that argument countless times before. The topic was such a heavy one that, even after discussing it so many times, they still had not given a definitive green light for the “you know what”.

Finally someone muttered a few words.

The man was staring at the pile of documents on the table as he did so.

“The Kremlin Report...”

Between the lines 1

Academy City had become quite busy, too.

In her dorm room, Misaka Mikoto was sitting on her bed. Her roommate, Shirai Kuroko, was not there. It seemed she had been needed on some job for Judgment.

They had the day off school.

It wasn’t because a typhoon was blowing in.

The odds were “still” low, but the odds of a Russian ballistic missile or bomber making it to Academy City were not zero.

While Academy City and Russia seemed intent on fighting each other, the

Japanese government had responded negatively to the idea of war. That wasn't exactly surprising. After all, Japan did not have an army, so they couldn't just decide to go to war. The Russians were acting on the assumption that it was a worldwide war, so America's attempts to deter them were ineffective.

Seeing that they had no chance of victory in all-out war, the Japanese government has pressured Academy City to quickly give into Russia's demands and avoid the war.

In response, Academy City had presented an extremely simple video.

It was footage of ballistic missiles exploding outside the atmosphere.

It wasn't just one or two missiles.

More than thirty of those fast moving shadows were flying through the sky at once and they were all shot down by Academy City interception weapons.

"We will not force you to do anything," said an Academy City spokesperson on the mobile 1seg broadcast. "However, we have no duty to protect anyone who is not our ally. Russia has already fired ballistic missiles without warning. Fortunately, none of them have been confirmed to have been loaded with nuclear warheads, but we do not know when that taboo will be lifted. We would like to take the course of action that we believe to be correct. But then, the country of Japan has the Aegis ships and PAC3s acquired with a large amount of tax money, so perhaps this is not all that much of a problem for you."

(…That's practically a threat.)

Academy City was saying it would remove its air defense network from the rest of Japan if they tried to interfere. It was true that the many American-made interception weapons the Self Defense Force had desperately been supplied with were excellent, but they could not compare to the Academy City weapons that were 20 or 30 years ahead in technology. Even a child knew the American weapons were not 100% accurate and they were in a situation where missing even once would bring tragedy.

Academy City was more or less threatening them using the Russian missiles, but the general populace didn't care. They just wanted to make sure those missiles did not fall on their own heads.

Thanks to that, the people were putting major pressure on the politicians. They were pressuring them not to provoke that city. They were begging them to allow their own cities to remain in the safety zone. With that flood of people's views, the politicians couldn't do anything which left Academy City able to do whatever it wanted.

The proclamation of war had been announced to the entire world and Mikoto had looked it up herself on the internet.

She knew that an aberrant city like Academy City would not give in to its demands.

However, she still felt an odd discomfort. While urging the people on with an indirect fear, Academy City was remaining a clean "ally of justice" that was protecting the people without getting its own hands dirty. That purity was very weird as if everything had been washed away with bleach. Mikoto found it odd that there didn't seem to be something hidden down below it all.

(Something, hm?)

Mikoto looked over to a different cell phone from the one she had been watching the video on.

This one had a Gekota strap on it.

She had called a certain spiky haired boy's number countless times, but she hadn't gotten through at all. And that boy had recently said he was in London when the coup d'etat was going on.

She had thought it was some kind of joke.

But…what if…?

What if that boy still hadn't returned to Academy City?

Mikoto decided it was worth looking into.

Ever since the proclamation of war, usage of the airport in District 23 had been restricted for civilians. And given the timing of the coup d'etat and the war, it may have been difficult for him to have come back.

Academy City seemed like it was cut off from the disturbances occurring outside, but it was actually at the center of the war.

If that boy was outside of the city, his level of danger shot up considerably. She couldn’t just ignore that possibility.

Chapter 2: The Beginning of the Invasion and the Counterattack. *Angel_Stalker.*

Part 1

Lessar was assembling small metal parts while walking through the white snow.

"…Nnn. The spare parts just aren't enough to make another Lessar Special Custom. I guess I have to go back to the old steel glove type. Damn, I should have at least documented the values for the theory behind the custom. I just happened to put the parts together right while messing around, so I'm not sure how to get the balance right again…" Lessar was staring down into the snow as she muttered. "Oh, there it is. Found it."

Kamijou didn't know what she was doing, but when he got down in the same pose as her, he figured out what she was looking at.

He had thought the snow was piled up to about 30 cm, but in the place Lessar was looking in, a cave of over 3 meters clearly opened up. It was like a tunnel made of snow.

"It was originally constructed in a V-shape. With the snow piled on top, it looked flat from above."

"But trucks transporting things to the base have driven along here…"

"If the snow was normally piled on top, the snow would match the V-shape. The

way the snow accumulated and its strength were magically altered. I doubt this snow would budge even if a passenger plane landed on it."

Kamijou looked down at his right hand.

"…It isn't going to bury us alive the instant I touch it, is it?"

"I dunno, but you should probably avoid touching the walls just in case," Lessar responded off hand as she slid herself down into the opening.

Just as Kamijou was about to follow, she suddenly stopped moving.

"Oh, crap… If I had made myself slip in the snow, I could have naturally grabbed onto you and shown you my panties opening up all sorts of new paths."

"Yes, I get it. Today, you're the king. So just get going."

Two train tracks ran side by side into the depths of the cave. A freight train was stopped there. It had about 5 cars. Kamijou couldn't see any kind of power cables, so it may have used a diesel engine.

"So he's using this to secretly bring in materials."

"I'm surprised," said Lessar looking on in puzzlement. "Fiamma of the Right blew away both the Roman Pope and Second Princess Carissa in one strike each. I didn't think he was the type to get creative like this in secret. I had envisioned him as the kind of person that would just destroy anything he didn't like."

"He used the authority of God's Right Seat to control the Roman Catholic Church in order to have events proceed the way he wanted without actually doing anything himself. I'd say this is quite normal for him. The fact that he's doing things himself is proof that his usual method won't cut it anymore."

Kamijou felt they were quite lucky to have found that freight train. After all, they were still 30 or 40 km from the base. Even if they had found a way to sneak in, they would still have had to walk through the snow if they had no means of transportation. If they had to do that, they would run out of stamina before even reaching Fiamma.

"Of course, I'm sure they'll notice if we just use the freight train."

“That’s why we wait until they move it. Over here. We need to hide in a random container.”

As he spoke, Kamijou headed for the container linked to the front car. The door looked like it could be opened from the side. The metal door slid open similarly to the door to the back seats of a van and Kamijou and Lessar hid inside.

Lessar was staring at the general area of Kamijou’s pocket.

“I’ve wanted to ask you this for a bit now, but what’s with that frog strap?”

“It’s Gekota. I don’t really know much about it though.”

“…A fancy mascot that you don’t know anything about? Sounds like a girl to me. I may need to change my strategy. I need to hurry up and wipe all the others away…”

As Lessar muttered to herself, she glanced around the inside of the container and her expression turned grim.

“Hmm. From the symbols I can see, these are mostly Christian spiritual items. I can’t tell what they’re used for though,” said Lessar whose eyes must have adjusted to the darkness fairly quickly. “And you seem rather used to this kind of thing.”

“During the coup d’etat, I snuck onto a freight train full of knights in order to get to Folkestone.”

“Oh, that’s right. Floris told me about that. She said she was ‘definitely going to kick that Japanese guy’s ass’ the next time she saw you.”

“I see. By the way, why was she caught by the knights?”

As they spoke, they heard a number of footsteps and voices from outside. The two of them fell silent and focused on what they could hear.

The voices seemed to be speaking in Russian, so Kamijou couldn’t understand them, but the people seemed to be opening various containers and loading boxes on them. He and Lessar hid behind the pile of spiritual items in case their container was opened, but it never happened. They heard the train’s engine start

from the front and the freight train lurched forward a bit as it started to move.

“…Were they Russian soldiers? Or were they magicians?”

“I’m not certain, but probably the latter. Odds are good they were with the Russian Orthodox Church. I heard them complaining about all the spiritual items.”

As the two of them hid within the container, the train headed closer and closer to the center of the mysterious fortress.

And then…

“…Ahh. It’s so hot in here. I guess our body heat just raises the temperature in a sealed area like this.”

“No fanning yourself with your skirt in here.”

“I won’t. That only has an effect when you get in a surprise attack with the perfect timi—”

Lessar trailed off and suddenly stopped moving.

Kamijou realized why an instant later.

She had realized that her sweat had made her sports shirt slightly transparent. And visible below it was her small bra that didn’t even look like it covered enough space to hide the tiny chips a female spy might have.

However, Lessar did not blush and try to cover her breasts with her hands.

“Dammit!! I was saving this secret weapon for a special occasion and now it’s been wasted!!”

“Why the hell did you come to Russia!? I thought something seemed odd when you were fanning with your skirt before, but…huh? You don’t mean…you’re kidding right!?”

Kamijou started trembling, but then the train reached its destination.

The train had taken about 20 to 30 minutes to reach the center of the base.

As it stopped, they heard the Russian voices again.

“We need to leave now,” said Lessar.

“Eh? Wouldn’t it be better to wait until they’ve left?”

“Your sense fails you at the weirdest times. They brought the train here to transport this stuff. They’re going to unload everything in the containers now. They’ll definitely find us here, so we need to leave before that can happen.”

Kamijou realized she was right, but it took courage to jump out in an area where people were clearly moving around.

Kamijou slightly opened the container’s sliding door and looked outside. Miraculously, no one was nearby. A mountain of wooden boxes was piled up on the snow and it looked like they could get through without being seen by hiding behind it as they went.

(…Chickening out will get me nowhere.)

“Let’s go,” Kamijou said as he slid the door open a little wider.

He then slipped his body through and out. He jumped down to the ground from a height of about a meter and then moved over to hide behind the pile of wooden boxes. Lessar followed suit, but her movements were suppler like those of a carnivore.

On the other side of the boxes, the men were unloading items from the train, so it felt like they were surrounded by footsteps and voices. With each noise, Kamijou’s body started sweating even more.

“Think about it in a positive light,” said Lessar with a calm expression. “The noisier they are, the less likely they are to notice the noises we make.”

The exit to the hastily made platform was about 10 meters away from the pile of boxes. He could see stairs heading up. The train station was below the snow, so the stairs most likely headed to the surface.

Kamijou and Lessar were now going to head towards the center of Fiamma’s fortress.

The number of guards and the amount of danger there would surely make the train station area seem like nothing.

He couldn’t let the current situation trip him up.

Kamijou focused on his surroundings and was about to head in the direction of the exit.

But then he ran across a Russian Orthodox magician.

The magician was a young man a bit older than Kamijou. He must have been one of the personnel unloading the train because he was holding a wooden box in his arms. The magician clearly hadn’t expected to run across anyone because he looked utterly shocked.

The fact that the man’s hands were full was a tiny piece of good luck for Kamijou.

The magician’s reaction was an instant slow.

In that time, Lessar moved.

“!!”

Her action was incredibly cool-headed. Lessar moved up to the magician silently and struck his defenseless throat with her arm. Unlike a strike from a fist, the pointed strike caused the magician’s body to go limp and collapse. Lessar reached out and grabbed the box he had been holding.

The man’s body fell to the ground making the bare minimum of noise and the other workers continued on not having noticed anything.

Kamijou felt an unpleasant feeling running through his fingertips.

“Please be careful,” said Lessar as she lowered the box to the ground gently.

She bound the young man’s ankles with a wire-like object, rearranged the pile of boxes to make an opening, and hid the man’s body in it.

“…H-he isn’t dead, is he?”

“That certainly would have been easier. Then I wouldn’t have had to use a valuable binding spiritual item like Dromi.”

It seemed the wire around the magician’s ankles prevented him from moving his body at all. The way Lessar explained that so smoothly, Kamijou realized again that she simply lived in a different world from him.

Meanwhile, she moved her tail causing the edge of her miniskirt to sway.

(It isn’t like me, but gaining some points in a more honest way may be more effective in the end. No, no, I’m sexy. I know I am!!)

The two of them headed up the stairs and made it to the surface within the grounds of the base. A few hundred meters ahead, they could see an iron fence barricade.

And the middle 7 kilometers of the 10 kilometer base bulged up greatly. There was about a 20 meter difference. The covering of snow made it look like there was some great form lying there.

“Aren’t bases usually kept in completely flat areas?”

“That alone tells us this place isn’t normal.”

A large entrance was sitting open in the “wall” portion of the large difference in height most likely for bringing in the items from the freight train. Kamijou and Lessar snuck in through there.

The inside was like a Western castle. However, it was not decorated with dazzling treasures of silver and gold. The area was made of stone and was damp. It looked like the area criminals would be imprisoned in.

Candles were set on the wall at even intervals and the two of them continued on relying on that flickering light.

Fortunately, they did not run into any guards or anyone else.

It was possible Fiamma had forbidden anyone else from entering the area.

“!!”

Lessar was about to head on further, but Kamijou grabbed her shoulder.

There was a door in front of him.

Opening it slightly and peering in, Kamijou saw a vast space on the other side. He didn't know what purpose the space had, but he heard a voice coming from it. It was a familiar voice.

"(…That's Fiamma. I never expected to run into him so quickly.)"

Even someone like Lessar stiffened when Kamijou whispered that to her.

The area looked like a church being repaired because it was made of old-looking stone and had a modern metal framework stretching across it in places. Fiamma was standing atop that metal framework. He was sitting in a chair next to a table. Both of the pieces of furniture looked out of place due to how high class they were. A thick book lay open on the table and a dim light was seeping from it.

No one else was there.

Only Fiamma's voice could be heard.

Was the book some kind of communications spiritual item?

"It is necessary. This is a 'space'. Both its coordinates and its volume are important."

Kamijou's heart gave a stir at hearing that voice.

"I have no interest in any Russian palaces. If all I wanted to do was sit on a throne, do you really think I would have gone out of the way to blow away St. Peter's Basilica? To me, this place is more important than Moscow. The slight lag in learning how things are going is a problem, but in order for the plan to move forward, I still can't leave this place . You need to look at this from the point of view of Project Bethlehem."

(…)

Kamijou focused and remained completely silent. If he didn't force himself to remain there, he was likely to just run in there yelling.

“I know, I know. You never really liked the idea of this fight. No, not World War III. I’m talking about the antagonism between Academy City and the Roman Catholic Church.”

Perhaps because there was no one else with Fiamma, his voice reached Kamijou’s ears despite the distance between the two of them. However, that also meant there was a danger of his own words reaching Fiamma. Kamijou grew even more nervous.

Who was Fiamma talking with?

“If Academy City wins, the age of the science side will come. If the Roman Catholic Church wins, the age of the magic side will come. However, neither scenario had much profit for the Russian Orthodox Church. Even if the age of the magic side came, the Roman Catholic Church would be in charge and the Russian Orthodox Church would lose any ground to stand on.”

Kamijou thought as Lessar translated the Russian.

But then his thoughts were cut off.

He had spotted another spiritual item on the table.

“That was why you quickly took measures against that. By joining with the force that would most benefit you, you hoped to gain the most when this large conflict was over. So hand over the results of the investigation already. Hand over the reports from the Russian soldiers you sent out to investigate.”

It was a small cylindrical tool.

It had a number of ring-shaped metal pieces on it making it look like a dial padlock.

It was Index’s remote control spiritual item.

It was the object that was making her suffer and robbing her of her consciousness.

If he…

If he could only destroy that…

“Yes, yes. Good boy. …The Elizalina Alliance, huh? So that explains why we couldn’t find Sasha Kreutzev even after searching all across Russia.”

Kamijou started to lean further forward.

But then someone covered his mouth from behind.

It was Lessar.

She then used her other hand to jab him sharply in the side. He was about to start coughing out of pain, but he couldn’t because of how tightly Lessar was pressing on his mouth.

Strength left his body.

“No, she may be imperfect, but she’s still a magician. Normal soldiers can’t handle her. And it would be a problem if she were to be shot. The Russian Orthodox Church? No, Annihilatus is useless here. I don’t know if they went easy on her because she used to be their comrade or if their basic specs are just that low, but they have yet to capture her. …It’s a pain, but it looks like I’ll have to do it myself. If it adds certainty to the plan, then it’s for the best.”

With his body held back, Kamijou glared at Fiamma through the cracked door.

Fiamma hadn’t noticed them.

“And let me tell you one thing. I’m sure you don’t intend to just remain a bishop. The highest position in the Russian Orthodox Church is the Patriarch, right? With your rate of growth, you aren’t going to make it to that position before your life comes to an end. If you want to use me to that end, you first have to do work that makes me want to use you. And if you’re going to hold back and try to negotiate with me, then I won’t hesitate to rid myself of you and find someone else. Understand?”

Fiamma closed the thick book as if bringing the conversation to a close and then grabbed Index’s remote control spiritual item.

Kamijou hadn’t realized it until that point, but there was something like a steel

window right next to Fiamma. Fiamma opened it and light poured into the dark room. He then took a light step outside the window.

He took another step and the remote control spiritual item was gone.

Lessar removed her hand from Kamijou's mouth and spun him around forcefully.

Kamijou was about ready to grab her by the collar.

"(…What the hell were you doing!? I was so close!!)"

"(…No, what the hell were *you* doing!? There are over 200 magicians in that room!)"

Hearing that, Kamijou's expression turned to one of shock.

He hadn't noticed that at all.

But when he looked back into the room, he saw a great number of what seemed to be glowing eyes in the depths of the darkness around the large space. They may have been doing some kind of work or they may have been on standby as Fiamma's guards.

"(…If you had just charged in here, you wouldn't have reach Fiamma. If Fiamma is the kind of person you said he is, he would have just run away while his subordinates dealt with us.)" Lessar spoke slowly in an attempt to calm down Kamijou. "(He mentioned the Elizalina Alliance and Sasha Kreutzev. He ordered the Russian soldiers to fall back, so he may be planning on making contact with Sasha himself. If you want to take that spiritual item from him, you have no choice but to try to cut him off. If we can find Sasha Kreutzev before him, we can prepare a surprise attack.)"

"(…Dammit.)"

Fiamma of the Right was a person who had controlled a large number of people to cause the chaos that was in the world. Kamijou had known that it wouldn't be so easy to reach him, but still…

"(…I guess we need to find Sasha then. If Fiamma wants her, it can't be for a

good reason. And most importantly, I need to settle this whole thing regarding Index.)”

Part 2

Hamazura Shiage drove along in the stolen car.

For the time being, he had acquired food, war funds, and gas for the car.

It was finally time to take action towards “fighting” Academy City. He had to find something in Russia he could use to negotiate with and guarantee his and Takitsubo’s safety.

“…But I have no idea what exactly I’m supposed to be looking for.”

“Well, it’s a small piece of fortune that Academy City forces and weapons are wandering throughout Russia due to the war. Hamazura, maybe we should start our attack there.”

“You’re saying we capture a cutting edge military weapon and use the technology to negotiate?”

“We could also monitor the Russian military movements and pass useful information on to Academy City.”

Hamazura couldn’t get a good grasp of the situation.

But that was to be expected. He may have experienced quite a bit, but he was still essentially a delinquent. Armies and military weapons just didn’t seem real to him. He didn’t even know how any kind of “negotiation” with a giant force like Academy City would actually happen.

On the other hand, the girl who had seen the depths of the city's darkness gave him advice.

"Hamazura, we need to think about what Academy City is after in this war."

"Eh? They're defending themselves against Russia's attack, right?"

"If that were true, there would be no reason to invade Russia. They would only need to set up a thorough defensive line in the ocean around Japan. Normally, a large group of bombers and ballistic missiles can't be completely defended against, but Academy City can pull it off. While buying time like that, they could slowly manipulate the world economy to put Russia in such economic trouble that they can't continue the war."

"…So Academy City has some other goal?"

"We need to figure out what that is and head to the center of whatever it is. Imagine a balanced scale. Hamazura, you are a small weight, but you just need to get in a position where you can affect which way it tilts by which plate you stand on. If you can do that, you can demand whatever you want from Academy City."

"…"

That meant he had to head into a place where Academy City and the Russian army were battling fiercely. He would have to charge in and get that information. That kind of strategy could literally cost him his life, but he would be letting go of one of his only opportunities if he did so.

"They've been going at it pretty harshly around here. The Elizalina Alliance is it called? I think we're somewhere near there. Maybe we should go look around there."

"…Yeah, let's do that, Hamazura…"

"? Takitsubo?"

Hamazura had a very bad feeling when he heard Takitsubo's frail response.

He glanced over at the passenger seat and then slammed on the brakes.

Something was wrong with Takitsubo.

She was sweating profusely all over her body.

“Hey, what’s wrong? Takitsubo, are you okay!?”

“I’m…fine. Don’t worry…Just keep going, Hamazura…”

It was no joke.

Anyone would be able to tell something wasn’t right. The Body Crystal must really have had a bad effect on Takitsubo. That fact was thrust before Hamazura’s eyes once more, but there was nothing he could do about it. He knew it wouldn’t help, but he still considered taking her to a hospital. However, a doctor from outside Academy City would not know how to heal her. And even if a doctor did, he would still be worried about her safety. Due to the war, Academy City and Russia weren’t exactly getting along. And Hamazura and Takitsubo had entered the country illegally without passports.

But he couldn’t just not do anything. He didn’t want to leave her as she was. For sentimental reasons, not logical ones, Hamazura wanted to put as little stress on Takitsubo’s body as possible. So what could he do? Searching for the means of negotiating with Academy City would require charging straight into a war-torn area.

As he tried to figure out what to do, he heard two small noises.

Someone had lightly knocked on the driver side window.

Looking out, he saw a large white man. He was probably Russian. Hamazura instinctually pulled out his handgun next to the door so the man couldn’t see it. As stated before, Academy City and Russia were not getting along. It was possible someone would attack him solely for being from Academy City.

Hamazura cautiously opened the window with the handgun still hidden.

The large white man spoke.

“I have acted as a Japanese-speaking guide for tourists before. Can you understand me?”

“What do you want?”

“It looks like you need a doctor.”

The man pointed with his chin towards Takitsubo in the passenger seat.

Hamazura was taken aback by that unexpected response and the man continued speaking.

“Let’s make a deal. My village is out of fuel for power generation. If we don't manage to get more, we will all freeze to death. This is a diesel car, right? If you hand over the fuel you have inside this worn-out car, I will lead you to a doctor in my village for the little lady there. What do you say?”

Part 3

Had the comfort of riding in a tank really improved all that much?

The engine was loud and the space stank of a mix of oil, exhaust, sweat, and filth. And a small space packed with 5 middle aged men would probably never be exactly comfortable.

Antseka S. Kfark sighed in the commander’s seat.

He was in central Russia.

There was no manual for how to deploy troops to defend that area from an external enemy. Defense was supposed to occur closer to the border and most plans had the troops deployed there or possibly cutting into the enemy nation’s border.

No one had thought about enemies getting that deep into the country.

And yet Academy City had ground troops there.

In a completely unexpected turn of events, they were working from the center and moving out.

"…Dammit. They're sending more down," muttered Antseka in annoyance as he stared up into the sky through the hatch. "Fuck, how can they call this bringing in the bare minimum of defensive weapons needed to maintain peace? I'm not even sure a unit could take out a single one of those cutting edge tanks and they're dropping them down like confetti. With those specs, they're clearly for an invasion and occupation."

"Eighty percent of their 2.3 million residents are students and yet they're still fighting on the same level as us. It just doesn't add up. Did you hear that some of those tanks can move around on their own without anyone aboard?" said one of the other soldiers aboard sounding a bit creeped out.

Antseka frowned even more.

"That's gotta just be some ridiculous rumor, but it really does seem like they can just do anything."

An Academy City supersonic bomber flew by overhead and a line of parachutes started falling down. Instead of more airborne tanks, the parachutes likely contained supplies for constructing simple bases.

Their bases had a few different stages.

They ranged from the log houses made of numerous steel plates to the shelters made of quick drying reinforced cement. Armored weapons—powered suits they were called?—constructed the bases at an astounding speed and they had been created all over Russia like roach nests.

It seemed Academy City hated to have their technology leaked outside.

As such, those fortresses likely had methods to blow them up or to recover them installed in them. Unlike the Russians who had their hands completely full with the fighting, Academy City was giving thought to after the war ended.

"There's just no end to them," spat out one of the other soldiers. "In the time we spent putting together a strategy to attack the base that appeared in front, another one was made in the back. While we were panicking over that, another one

appeared cutting off our supply line. They're just too fast. Not even a merchant skipping town works that quickly."

At first, they had tried to shoot down the parachutes, but it hadn't had any effect. Even when their anti-aircraft guns and machine guns blew holes in the fabric, they grew wings like a glider or other parachutes appeared. There just didn't seem to be any limit.

Antseka and the others just felt that they couldn't get to the stage they excelled at.

They weren't idiots. They surely had more real battle experience than the people from Academy City who just persistently used technology. They were confident that they could at least fight with 50/50 results if it came down to a proper firefight. That meant it would end up a stalemate and Academy City would be unable to invade any further.

However, it never even made it to that kind of battle they knew so well.

The fight never came to those veteran tank men.

Normally, Academy City's unusual strategy would have been absolutely impossible. Given the materials, personnel, and time needed to construct the bases and the materials and energy needed to maintain the bases, building them one after another in the middle of enemy territory and connecting supply lines between them just didn't sound realistic. Any soldier or even journalist would be able to immediately see multiple issues with that strategy.

And yet Academy City made up for those weak points with overwhelming technology.

The supersonic bombers could supply large amounts of materiel and fuel at unthinkable speeds. The powered suits could accurately assemble the materials at extremely high speed. It almost seemed like some kind of joke. The soldiers felt like they needed to rewrite the texts they had read in their training days to even begin to keep up with it.

"What do we do?" asked one of the soldiers who was clearly middle aged but was still one of the younger ones in the tank. "We're almost out of fuel and shells and that base has sealed off our escape and supply routes. I hope someone

can come up with some kind of ground-breaking strategy for a counterattack, but…”

“At this rate, we’ll be out of commission without having even run into another tank,” said another soldier sounding as if he’d had enough of the situation.

When the large number of parachutes had first started to fall from the supersonic bombers, their unit had put stopping the construction of the base at top priority. However, shooting down the parachutes had no effect and the powered suits on the ground had evaded the shells with astounding movements. The powered suits had then accurately returned fire with huge shotguns that had perhaps been supplied to help dig up the area for the shelter.

As the suits had toyed with them using their strange movements, more and more supplies and airborne tanks had been dropped down. Before Antseka and the others knew it, their movements were being obstructed by a huge difference in firepower.

He realized they had been wasting their ammunition.

If they had known the strategy Academy City was using, they may have been able to react more calmly and preserve some of their shells, but nothing could be done about it anymore.

As Antseka recalled their situation, one of his fellow soldiers looked over at him.

“I know we need to surrender, but I can’t stand having this end without having done a damn thing. Let’s take out at least one of them. I know it’s only a drop in the bucket, but this country truly is done for if we can’t reduce their forces by even a little.”

Antseka looked up at the white sky through the hatch.

Even then, a few bombers were flying through the sky at over 7000 kph and dropping a large number of parachutes.

“Hey. If those had been large bunker-destroying bombs instead of supplies, what do you think we could’ve done?”

“…”

An unpleasant silence spread throughout the tank.

That was what the true role of the supersonic bombers was supposed to be and it was probably the simplest way of silencing Antseka and the others.

Why had Academy City gone out of their way to carry out such a roundabout strategy?

Antseka looked up into the sky out of annoyance and spat out a few words.

“So this is their humane way of using their weapons? They’re mocking us.”

Part 4

Kamijou and Lessar had entered the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations. Kamijou had thought its border would be heavily guarded because of the war, but they were able to more or less head right through.

“Unlike island nations like Japan or the UK, the land borders between countries are fairly easy to get through.”

“Yeah, but that was still too easy. Given the circumstances, it wouldn’t have surprised me if someone had tried to shoot us.”

“They don’t have the spare resources to do something like that. And you passed over quite a few borders to get into Russia in the first place, right?”

“Well, I made it here by hitchhiking with various people, so I don’t really know the exact route I took.”

“…Hmm. You may not have realized it because you didn’t understand the language, but you might have had quite the adventure,” Lessar muttered.

They were in some sort of plaza and a number of people were walking about. It looked more like there were people of multiple races there rather than just one specific race. Kamijou wasn't sure about the specifics, but it sounded like different people were speaking different languages.

"The Elizalina Alliance is made from small areas splitting off from Russia because they disagreed with how Russia was doing things, right?"

"Technically, it's a collection of countries that did that," said Lessar correcting him. "This is a landlocked area, so any one country that splits off will then be surrounded by Russian land in every direction, so they would need permission from the Russian government to gain personnel and goods. To free themselves from that indirect control, it seems the Elizalina Alliance gathered together a few smaller countries to create a route heading outside of Russia that connects to Eastern Europe. Thanks to that, Russia has alienated the Elizalina Alliance the most of all the other independent nations."

Because of that, the Elizalina Alliance was quite narrow and stretched from east to west. It was about 300 km long. The odds of just running into the person you were searching for were quite low.

"Anyway, we need to find Sasha before Fiamma does," Kamijou said urging himself on. "But how do we go about searching for her?"

"First, we need to rent a room at an inn to use as a base."

"Yeah, we might not find her in one day with such a wide area to search in."

"Of course, we'll only be renting one room because we need to preserve what money we have. If you want to add any kind of indecent meaning into it, feel free."

"Is that just what your basic thought patterns are set to or something!?"

"You don't like the inn idea? So you're suggesting outside!? B-but that could be a problem. I have no issues with the basic idea of doing it outdoors, but it's just so cold here."

"…Okay, I get it. We need to have a serious discussion."

Kamijou grabbed Lessar, dragged her into an alley, and gave her a serious 15 minute lecture. Lessar was mentally exhausted when she returned to the plaza with the boy.

“So how are we going to search for her? Sasha is a magician, so we might be able to find her if we look for traces of anything mystical.”

“I-I think I know a simpler way.”

“?”

Kamijou looked confused at Lessar’s response, but he noticed something odd soon thereafter.

Four or five men were hiding amid the crowd of people walking by and they were watching Kamijou and Lessar closely. They were wearing dark green military uniforms, but the uniforms made them show up even more in the white snow.

“They’re the border guards,” said Lessar simply. “As you just said: it was too easy. They aren’t idiots. They aren’t in a situation where they are even able to get camouflage that matches the environment, but they are still trying to defend their country.”

“Wh-what do we do?”

“That’s simple enough. We ask them.”

Kamijou looked confused, but Lessar explained further.

“Fiamma used the Russian army to search for Sasha Kreutzev’s whereabouts, right? That means some of them must have headed along the border to search. Even if they didn’t find the Sasha, the Russian army’s actions must have been noticed by the Elizalina forces, right? And now the leader of the entire war is going to be sneaking into the Elizalina Alliance. That’s information we can use to negotiate with them.”

Part 5

Two forces glared at each other on the battlefield that was the Strait of Dover between England and France.

An unknown semitransparent substance covered the ocean surface and tens, hundreds, and even thousands of swords crossed above it. It had gone beyond the scale of a mere battle. It had reached a point where it was clearly a war.

France had more when it came down to pure numbers, but England was the one pushing forward.

Kanzaki Kaori's presence was quite valuable.

Her power as one of the world's fewer than 20 Saints allowed her to knock back a large number of magicians with a single strike. The Amakusa Church members around her would at times support her and at times use her as a decoy to accurately strike from a different direction. This made them much more successful than their mere numbers would suggest.

"Hoo…!!"

The scabbard of Kanzaki's sword destroyed a large portion of the semitransparent land at their feet. Girls wearing black nun's habits jumped up on the smashed pieces that were flying up and attacked the French magicians from above.

They were the nuns of the former Agnese Forces.

That force with Agnese Sanctis at its center was battling in a similar fashion to the Amakusas. They also were able to work more effectively because of their intimate knowledge of how those from the Roman Catholic Church fought.

But even all that was not enough to repel the French forces.

They had no magician in an extremely special position like a Saint. Instead their

strength was augmented by a large number of weapons and spiritual items they gained from the Roman Catholic Church that had over 2 billion followers. While some were the stereotypical types used by a single person like staffs or cups, quite a few odd tank-like spiritual items could be seen. Those had giant swords instead of gun barrels and armor that looked like parts off of a suit of armor.

Seeing that, Second Princess Carissa spoke sounding bored.

“This is still a test run. I’d say they’re trying to scout out how much power we have.”

She was still not holding any kind of weapon.

Carissa was guarded by a large number of knights and she had an elegant and solid feel to her.

She turned to Knight Leader who was at her side.

“Now then. I wonder where France’s main force lies. I’m pretty sure I’m seeing knight related magic mixed in with the Roman Catholic based magicians. But that knight related magic is still at a level where it can be explained within the category of the Christian Church, so…”

“Christian-style French knights would probably be Charlemagnic, don’t you think?”

“Or maybe that mastermind of a holy woman who’s doing nothing but yawning in Versailles went crying to the remnants of the Orleans Knights despite how it would make her look.”

“…I’d rather you did not underestimate me like that,” said a voice suddenly from an unknown source.

Carissa’s eyebrows moved ever so slightly.

“My pride is not so cheap that I would leave them behind simply for self defense. In fact, I’m rather resentful that all that was resolved by a British mercenary,” said the voice.

“Oh? You seem to be a little drowsy still, so why don’t you go wash your face?

You may never leave Versailles, but that was all caused by your slow reaction. Just like this time."

"You cannot do anything either," said the "brains" of Versailles quietly. "We know that Curtana Original was destroyed and that the Second is with Queen Elizard. In other words, you have no real power right now. And as long as you are outside the borders of the United Kingdom, the knights surrounding you do not have all that much power either. I am aware that you love war, but are *you* aware that you are merely in the way?"

"You fool," Carissa muttered.

Immediately afterwards, the knights around the second princess received a large amount of power from Curtana.

They received the power from Curtana Second. Elizard must have sent out some sort of order. However, that was not enough to explain it. Curtana's effects were supposed to only work within the borders of the United Kingdom.

"Surely you know that I was planning to head out to Europe in order to destroy all opposing forces if I had succeeded in my coup d'etat using Curtana Original."

"You don't mean…?"

"How do you think I intended to do that? Did you think I was just going to complain about my inability to use Curtana's power outside of the UK?"

A loud noise resounded from about 10 kilometers behind Carissa.

Something was floating up there. It was a ridiculously huge construction. The mysterious structure could perhaps be referred to as a "square bubble" created from a random assortment of dozens of cubes made of heavy stone. The object did not seem to use any sort of normal construction technology. It looked both like an artificial castle and like a giant piece of quarried stone that was now floating in midair.

"That is the Mobile Fortress Glastonbury," said Carissa. "The surroundings of the fortress are forcibly designated as within the United Kingdom, so it allows Curtana's usable area to be rapidly expanded. Don't you think this large scale spiritual item is just perfect for making an invasion regardless of what your

opponent thinks?”

The situation turned around.

Having gained power, the knights drew their swords to protect Carissa.

“This is not a war of attrition for the sake of defense.”

A slow change occurred across the knights spread out to defend Carissa.

They went from passive to active.

The princess of military matters announced what that meant.

“This is a clean-up battle for the sake of making an attack.”

Part 6

Kamijou and Lessar walked along the plaza while surrounded by numerous large men. Kamijou did not like being taken somewhere by military looking men who he didn’t speak the same language as. As he nervously walked along, Lessar spoke to him sounding bored.

“It’s okay. The Elizalina Alliance should want any information on Fiamma they can get. They want that information badly, so I’m sure they won’t throw us into a detention facility or anything. In fact, this Alliance doesn’t even have any dangerous facilities like that.”

“…Really? Having expectations like that completely overturned is the usual pattern of Kamijou-san’s misfortune, you know? What do we do if they’re leading us to some room with chairs that have restraints on them?”

“Fine, fine. If that happens, I’ll apologize by putting on a babydoll, crawling on all fours, and waving my ass. …Hm, that actually sounds pretty nice. How I about I do it now?”

“It looks like you need more lecturing, Lessar-kun. It might bother others here, so how about we head over to that alley?”

The instant Kamijou grabbed the girl and started to leave the circle of people, shouts in Russian erupted around him. A few of the large men reached for their holstered pistols.

“Wah!! Okay, okay. Damn, this just doesn’t feel like a warm welcome!”

“I was joking. I don’t intend to give that kind of service to the other people around here. I doubt that would benefit the UK any. I’ll be a good girl for now, but when we get to our hotel room, I’ll put on the babydoll and we can go from there.”

As they argued back and forth, one of the men escorting them muttered something sounding exceedingly displeased. It was in Russian so Kamijou couldn’t understand him, but Lessar translated it for him.

“He asked if we saved a mother and her daughters who were being transported in a truck in Russia. It seems one daughter is a 2 year old baby and the other is a 10 year old girl.”

“…? We did help with that convoy of trucks and armored carriages, but…how many people were on those things? I don’t specifically remember anyone like that.”

The large man spat out a few more words in response to Kamijou’s puzzled expression.

Lessar frowned and then shrugged before looking in Kamijou’s direction.

“He says they were his sister and her daughters.”

For the man to know about that, the people in the trucks must have made it safely to a nearby town and made contact by phone or something.

It was possible the man felt indebted to them and that was the sole reason he wasn't pointing his handgun at them.

Kamijou and Lessar were brought to a rectangular building made of stone that was located near the plaza. It was probably originally a building on the grounds of a church, but it was now being used as a military facility.

The paper documents were far too cluttered for it to be called an office and the steel desks were not in uniform locations. A map of the area was stuck on a whiteboard on the wall. Magnets of different colors indicated the locations of Elizalina Alliance and Russian tanks and other troops. One of the colors vastly outnumbered the other.

A blonde woman was waiting there.

She was very thin. In fact, she was so thin that you would be worried for her health more than aroused if she were wearing a swimsuit. Her slightly sunken eyes turned in their direction and she smiled thinly.

She spoke in Japanese.

"So you say Fiamma of the Right is headed here?"

Lessar gave a whistle.

Kamijou thought the woman must be an acquaintance of Lessar's, but it seemed that wasn't so.

"That's the woman the Elizalina Alliance is named after. She's the holy woman who had the different countries break away and join together," Lessar said.

"So you say Fiamma of the Right is headed here?" Elizalina repeated.

To meet with people who had illegally entered the country, the name "Fiamma of the Right" must have been ominous indeed to the Elizalina Alliance.

That wasn't too surprising though because he was the man who had pulled the trigger causing World War III.

If it hadn't been for that, it was unlikely the Russian army would have started

invading them.

“We heard him say it himself in the Russian army base near the border, so I’m pretty sure he is.”

After explaining that, Kamijou realized something.

“…Wait a second. Elizalina-san, do you know exactly who Fiamma of the Right is?”

Essentially, he was asking her if she knew about the magic side and of the depths of the Roman Catholic Church.

Elizalina responded while barely moving her lips.

“I may not be very skilled, but I am a magician.”

“Even if she wasn’t, she was still able to respond so quickly just from the partial reports from her subordinates. She determined how valuable we were and immediately had us brought to her, the center of the country. Just from that, it was clear she knew of magic,” added Lessar.

It seemed she knew of the legends of Elizalina’s achievements.

“On the surface, she lay down the foundation for the various countries to be independent both politically and economically, but she also secretly pushed back the Russian Orthodox magicians who were attempting to damage the Alliance by occult means. If we got into a serious fight, even I may get my ass kicked.”

“Oh, it was nothing that amazing. I merely made a few suggestions and helped a bit. It was nothing at all compared to my sister in France.”

Elizalina brushed Lessar’s words aside. It seemed she did not like having others speak highly of her.

She quickly moved back to the real matter at hand.

“Fiamma of the Right is an important figure when it comes to this war…no, to the invasion of this country. If we can use this opportunity to defeat him, the threat to the people’s lives will lessen by quite a bit.”

Kamijou agreed with that much, but the rest was different.

“On the other hand, I do not think that I can defeat Fiamma of the Right. It is an issue of his ability as a magician. Even if we gathered up everyone in this country, we would not be able to defeat him.”

Elizalina looked troubled as she said that.

Even she did not want to just overlook that opportunity.

With Fiamma seeming to be within their grasp, they wanted to take action to escape from their crisis as quickly as possible.

She was probably only able to prevent herself from doing that because she was a skilled politician.

It may look like an opportunity at first glance, but it could actually bring on even more danger.

“The most important thing for us is the lives of the country’s people. If it would only cause those lives to be lost in vain, we must avoid a fight with Fiamma.”

“So you’re just going to let him do whatever he wants?” asked Lessar.

Elizalina shook her head.

“No,” she immediately responded. “My subordinates have informed me of the situation. The target of the Russian’s - and therefore Fiamma’s—search is Sasha Kreutzev. We know where she is. She is very close by. In fact, I could summon her here at any time. Now that you know that, can you figure out how I plan to defeat Fiamma while protecting the lives of the people?”

“…You’re going to take us and Sasha outside of the Alliance and into Russia where we’ll carry out some kind of anti-Fiamma strategy?”

“Correct,” Elizalina nodded. “You can think of me as a cold person if you like, but that is just how delicate a situation this is. A single careless decision could end up killing a great number of unrelated people.”

“No,” Kamijou smiled. “We were actually planning to use you all to find Sasha.

I’m just glad you aren’t locking us up.”

“The scale may be different, but it seems you too have people you must protect.”

“Everyone does,” Kamijou responded calmly. “Because it took me so long to realize it, I’m in danger of losing her, but I may still be able to make it in time.”

In any case, they had to meet up with Sasha Kreutzev, lure Fiamma to them after leaving the Elizalina Alliance, and then defeat him. They still had the chance of creating a situation where they had more of an advantage than Fiamma, but as time went by, that chance was slipping away.

And as that slipped away, so did the odds of rescuing Index.

Having worked out the situation in his own mind, Kamijou asked Elizalina a question.

“What exactly are we going to do?”

“Come here. …I cannot guarantee our victory because of the suddenness of the situation, though.”

As she spoke, Elizalina headed toward the whiteboard in the corner of the room.

And then…

“That’s true. You’re much too late if you’re still strategizing at this stage,” said a sudden male voice.

Kamijou recognized the voice. It was a voice he would never forget.

It was Fiamma of the Right’s voice.

The voice was coming from the window. Kamijou hurriedly turned around at the same time as Lessar and Elizalina moved. Lessar stuck a bar magnet on the end of a retractable baton and Elizalina took a piece of semitransparent blue cellophane that was likely a sweets wrapper and stuck it on the side of a glass full of water.

It only took a few seconds.

They were likely quickly creating spiritual items.

Immediately afterwards, fire and water shot forth.

With the roar of the air being split, the two forms of attacks rushed towards the window like an avalanche. The glass shattered, but the voice did not stop.

“This is just a greeting,” said Fiamma’s voice.

A small doll made of kneaded flour was floating outside the window.

“Things have yet to truly begin.”

Immediately afterwards, a vibration passed through Kamijou Touma’s brain.

His vision shook for an instant and he thought his face had been punched by something heavy. When he finally realized he had fallen to the ground at some point, he also realized what it was that had hit him in the face.

It was a piece of rubble even smaller than a baseball.

About half of the ceiling had collapsed bringing down rubble.

In the opening, he saw something like a wall of orange light.

Kamijou was one of the closest ones to the scene, but he did not know that a giant sword 30 or 40 kilometers long had been swung down. After all, the base of the sword, was so far away it was almost disappearing off the horizon. A sizzling sound could be heard coming from the sword. It wiggled back and forth and then slowly lifted up much like an axe being pulled out of a large tree.

“With something this big, aiming can be a pain,” Fiamma said cheerfully.

Kamijou trembled as the giant sword that could split a mountain range in two was once more casually lifted up.

It lifted up almost completely vertically.

And then Fiamma’s sword swung down all at once.

The air shook.

It was almost directly above them.

He had corrected his aim and dropped the giant sword down from directly above. The Elizalina Alliance city was sliced in a straight line and the stone building Kamijou and the others were in took the brunt of the blow causing it to be almost completely smashed to smithereens.

A cloud formed.

The difference in air pressure created by the slicing of the atmosphere created something similar to a contrail.

That strike had affected the weather.

And then…

“Ooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

Kamijou Touma yelled out and stuck his right palm straight up.

He could hear an unpleasant creaking noise coming from within his bones.

But that boy’s seemingly ordinary arm managed to receive that strike that could slice the map in two.

(Did I…stop it?)

As it was her first time seeing Imagine Breaker, Elizalina looked shocked and Lessar seemed to find it hard to accept despite having seen the power before. However, he didn’t have time to explain every little thing. Kamijou wasn’t even sure none of his bones had been broken.

Then…

“Oh, and I thought you might have learned something during British Halloween,” said a voice from very nearby.

It was Fiamma of the Right.

Kamijou immediately recognized the red figure that jumped in right in front of him.

There was a disconnect between the person who activated the magic and the place the magic had been activated in.

It was similar to Second Princess Carissa when she used both Curtana Original and the bunker clusters.

It seemed he was drawing their focus with the large scale attack so he could send his true attack at their unguarded side.

“…!?”

Kamijou immediately held up his right hand, but he had only just destroyed the giant orange sword. A numb throbbing pain was still running through his arm which slowed his reaction speed. With a calm expression, Fiamma used that short time to stretch his own hand out towards Kamijou.

Kamijou had no idea what effects that mysterious hand held.

“Kh!!”

Elizalina cut in between them.

The front of her body was glowing slightly. She must have activated some kind of magic. She was a magician who had been continually using her power below the surface while allowing multiple countries to split off from the larger country of Russia. Kamijou assumed those experiences allowed her to freely use some amazing spells.

But Fiamma ignored her.

Kamijou and Elizalina were mercilessly blown away a few meters.

His breathing briefly stopped.

Fiamma started to add in another mysterious attack, but then his movements stopped. The reason was his right arm. What looked like a mysterious third arm appeared from his shoulder.

Kamijou had been saved by Elizalina’s skill.

If it hadn’t been for her, his body would have been split in two horizontally.

“I see,” Fiamma said as if he were impressed as he tapped at his shoulder with his left hand. “That is a rather tough wall to break through easily.”

At that point, the two large men who had been staying at Elizalina’s side jumped forward.

“Bellagi!! Longhe!! Stay back!!” Elizalina yelled out while still collapsed on the ground, but they did not stop. And Fiamma did not hold back.

“However, it is not so tough I cannot break through it. Don’t underestimate me.”

All sound disappeared.

Immediately after Fiamma swung his third arm, Bellagi and Longhe were blown away to the side. The distance between them did not matter. Bellagi may have been in range of the third arm, but Longhe had clearly not been. And yet he was knocked away just the same. They were knocked away through the hole of rubble that the initial strike had created in the building.

Kamijou forced his injured body to stand.

“Fiamma!!”

“You’re the main dish. I need to make some preparations before eating you.”

The attacker’s gaze turned in the direction of Elizalina.

Once again a mysterious pale light began to be emitted from the surface of her body.

However, the previous exchange had made it clear just how much of a difference there was between their powers. Her defensive spell had been breached. If Fiamma went all out, it was possible Elizalina would be killed.

(I have my right hand…)

Kamijou gritted his teeth while focusing on his arm that still had some pain remaining in it.

(But can I really block every single attack!? Can I really rescue Index while doing nothing but defending and receiving attacks!?)

Fiamma paid no heed to Kamijou and the others’ surprise and hesitation.

He made another careless action.

“!!”

But Fiamma’s right arm did not manage to grab and rip out Elizalina’s throat.

It was thanks to Lessar.

The small girl cut in between them while holding something like a spear. It was the steel glove, a magical weapon that had four finger-like blades on it. Lessar forcefully swung it down like a guillotine.

“You’re in the way.”

The action was less like a backhand blow and more like the action of someone brushing away a spider web.

Even so, the steel glove was smashed to pieces. Lessar’s small frame shot away like a bullet. Just before she struck the wall, Bellagi stretched out his arms having just reentered the building. He just barely managed to catch Lessar.

In that instant Lessar had risked her life for, Elizalina stood up to a crouched position while making complex motions with her fingers. A glow that flickered irregularly appeared at the tips of her fingers.

When Fiamma saw it, he laughed.

“You’re trying to construct a spell using the ‘right arm’ against me?”

Immediately afterwards a beam of light shot forth from Fiamma’s right arm.

Fiamma’s action was not even in the same dimension as showing off his ability. It was more like he was crushing an annoying insect flying in front of his face. Whatever Elizalina did would only destroy her body further.

Earlier she had said that the full force of the Elizalina Alliance could not defeat Fiamma of the Right. That was why she wanted to carry out an interception outside of the Alliance in order to defeat him.

So by the very fact that Fiamma was standing there, Elizalina’s fate may have been sealed.

But that was not what happened.

The loud sound of competing powers rang out.

It was the sound of Fiamma’s beam striking Kamijou’s right hand.

Kamijou had jumped in front of Elizalina and blocked Fiamma’s attack, but the beam scattered in every direction as if it were escaping Kamijou’s hand instead of disappearing instantly. That was nothing more than an after effect different from what Fiamma had wanted.

However, a loud noise drowned out all other noises.

The after effects of the beam that were sent to the sides blew the remains of the room’s walls away and continued on into the plaza. They travelled diagonally upwards, so they did not hit any of the people in the plaza, but the stone buildings there had their roofs blown off.

Kamijou Touma and Fiamma of the Right, two people who had special right

arms, glared at each other.

“Let’s do this. You know why I’m fighting.”

“What?” Fiamma said while looking slightly confused.

He looked over at Kamijou’s right shoulder.

“I told you that you were the main dish. Are you going to force me to do this first?”

“!!”

Lessar had been blown away to the edge of the wall, but she took action. She picked up the pieces of iron that remained of her steel glove and threw them like bullets.

She was not aiming for Fiamma.

She knew that wouldn’t work from the strike before.

The objects Lessar threw hit Kamijou in the side. His stiffened body bent in as he was knocked to the side. Immediately afterwards, Fiamma’s right arm fell down like a guillotine. The floor melted. It was clear what would happen to a human body that received that attack.

“…G-ghah…!?”

Kamijou rolled along, broke through the remnants of a wall, and out into the plaza. Fiamma slowly walked over while Kamijou writhed atop the snow. He did not even look over at Elizalina who seemed to have been his first target. She must have been more of an annoying insect he needed to crush than an important target for his strategy.

Fiamma of the Right had two important targets.

The first was Kamijou Touma’s right arm.

The second was Sasha Kreutzev.

(…Not good. He’s just doing whatever he wants with no real resistance. We

can’t fight him while protecting Sasha with things like this.)

The one bit of luck in the situation was the fact that Fiamma had not found Sasha yet. According to Elizalina, she was very close by, but they had more options as long as Fiamma had not found her yet.

As Kamijou was thinking, Fiamma suddenly started to speak.

“Did you know that modern magician that was established at the end of the 19th century fundamentally hates working in groups? Even a genius group starting with “Golden” had an internal split caused by personality issues. The Roman Catholic Church worked at the goal of creating group fighting techniques with its doctrine at the core, but…well, you know how things are, right? Magicians value the individual. That is why the subjective targets known as magic names are still valued highly today and why the secret organization known as God’s Right Seat was born.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“In other words…”

Fiamma lifted his right hand up so it was horizontal.

He was standing in the middle of the plaza, but he paid the people in the area no heed. Those people were so trapped by their fear that they could not even run away, but he made no attempt to conceal the idea of magic while speaking to Kamijou.

“Let’s say there is someone about to be killed before your eyes. And then hundreds if not thousands of innocent people will be killed in an invasion. If you were a powerful magician, do you think you would continue to hide and do nothing just because you were important to the enemy’s plan?”

“!?”

Kamijou’s body stiffened.

He had seen an angel in the crowd of people.

It was actually a figure wearing red. The figure’s body was bound by black belts

and was wearing red innerwear and a cloak. It was possible some magic was at work in order to prevent that figure from standing out in the plaza.

The figure was Sasha Kreutzev.

Upon seeing her, Kamijou forgot the situation they were in and felt erroneous relief. She was the archangel who had held a Saint like Kanzaki Kaori in check while also constructing the Sweep spell that would kill 6 billion people. The thought of receiving help from someone that powerful was certainly reassuring.

But then he realized something.

The person he was seeing was not the archangel Misha Kreutzev that Kamijou Touma knew.

She was nothing more than the Russian Orthodox magician Sasha Kreutzev.

She tried to do something.

She was a professional Russian Orthodox magician, so her skills were most likely top notch.

However…

“Today is my lucky day.”

Fiamma flicked something with his finger.

Whatever it was weaved between the people in the crowd towards Sasha at the speed of an arrow and knocked her backwards at the same speed.

“I thought this would be a little harder. I never expected to get both of you so easily.”

Fiamma must have been confident that his strike had completely sealed Sasha’s movements because he did not head after her. He looked back over to Kamijou instead.

“…”

Kamijou stared back silently.

He didn’t know very much about magical battles. However, he knew that the only thing that had a chance against Fiamma’s right arm was his own Imagine Breaker. It was no time to debate whether he should do it or not. If he didn’t charge in there, Fiamma would just kill a large number of people before his eyes.

It was one on one.

There was no one else and nothing else he could rely on.

And then Fiamma of the Right made an odd movement.

He unconcernedly swung his head to the side.

Immediately afterwards, something like a scratch appeared across his cheek. A strange crack ran across the wall of the building behind him.

It seemed the people in the plaza had no idea what had just happened.

The unreal scene before their eyes had paralyzed their ability to determine what was going on.

“…”

However, Kamijou gulped slightly because of his limited knowledge of magic.

Fiamma had evaded an attack.

Kamijou was surprised by the sudden attack itself, but he was even more surprised by how Fiamma had reacted to it.

“What a nostalgic face,” Fiamma of the Right said.

Kamijou turned around.

He saw the color yellow.

Standing there was a woman with piercings all over her face and heavy makeup around her eyes. Her appearance was intentionally made to bring disgust out from others. Her clothes seemed to be based on something a woman from the middle ages would wear, but it did not give an old fashioned impression due to its showy yellows. It looked more like some kind of showy punk fashion.

Kamijou Touma knew who she was.

On September 30th, she had used a spell that used divine punishment to almost completely cease all functionality within Academy City. As a member of God's Right Seat, she had showed Kamijou a conflict that crossed a certain line.

He heard a jangling noise.

She had a piercing on her tongue with a thin chain connected to it. The chain extended down to about her waist where a transparent cross that seemed to be made of ice was connected to the end. The cross alone was different from what Kamijou remembered.

She was Vento of the Front.

The first person to make Fiamma of the Right evade was a magician who was supposed to be from the same organization as him.

"I have no duty to support that kid or that Russian Orthodox nun, but I've had enough of seeing you mess around with the Roman Catholic Church."

"I heard you can no longer use your special Divine Punishment."

"Do you really think that's enough to stop me?"

With a roar, something invisible swirled up.

Two members of God's Right Seat, two magicians of a different dimension altogether who stood at the top of a church with 2 billion followers, clashed.

Part 7

Accelerator leaned on his modern cane and looked around the area.

The darker side of Academy City had placed the recovery of the pieces of parchment he had found on the freight train at the same level as pursuing him, so it was possible they were not just superstitious scribbles.

Accelerator did not believe in the occult, but they may have had something written on them about scientific technology that would be valuable even in modern times.

(…Although, I suppose that's just me trying to make sense of this logically.)

Accelerator breathed in deeply.

Due to an exceedingly subjective feeling, he found the parchments to be odd.

That feeling was one of pressure in the center of his chest.

It was similar to what he felt when Unabara Mitsuki was nearby. Accelerator recalled that boy's powers being referred to as if they were not simply esper powers (of course that could very well just be a bluff to keep what his esper power as a secret), so he wondered if there was any connection.

He was interested in where the pieces of parchment were supposed to have been delivered.

Accelerator couldn't tell what kind of information was written on the parchments, so he concluded it would be fastest to get that information out of the person who was meant to receive them. Of course, the destination might have just been a relay point meaning the person receiving them there wouldn't know what their ultimate objective was, but then he would just have to go relay point by relay point until he made it to a person who knew how the parchments were to be used.

He needed to find out if they held a clue to saving Last Order who not even the cutting edge technology of Academy City could save.

Accelerator was prepared to even directly attack a military base if it came to it, but then…

“Tch. They were already attacked.”

A burnt smell permeated the area.

The area had likely originally been a Russian Air Force base. The white plain had been cut off by asphalt for kilometers and fence barricades surrounded the area. Inside were numerous runways and large bunker-like buildings made of special concrete.

Accelerator could not see anyone there.

The fence had been torn away, the thick concrete walls had been blown away, and fighters with flames spewing from them were scattered along the runways like toys. Ammunition must still have been detonating from the fires because explosions occasionally resounded like fireworks from the ruins of the buildings despite no voices being heard.

Accelerator had no way of knowing if someone who knew how the parchments were to be used had been there or if it had just been a relay point so they could be transported by air.

(…Academy City.)

However, it had not been the normal Academy City forces that were taking on the Russian army publicly. The means made it clear that an underground organization from the world of evil had snuck into Russia for the attack.

He couldn’t find a single empty cartridge.

There were cracks running through the walls, but the shells that had broken through the walls had all been recovered.

Academy City liked to avoid having its technology leak out, but that was on a whole new level.

If they just wanted to take control of the base, they would not have needed the underground organization. The regular forces could have easily invaded the base.

That meant they had most likely been after the pieces of parchment that were in Accelerator’s pocket.

Forces had been sent to recover the parchments themselves while a different force had been sent to the air force base they were headed for. Accelerator might be able to find a survivor if he carefully searched through the base, but he was sure everyone related to the parchments had either been killed or captured.

There was no hint there.

His last vague lifeline had been cut, but Accelerator's head was full of questions instead of impatience.

(…Are these parchments really that valuable?)

If so, what were they used for?

Were they really something Academy City wanted to get their hands on no matter what?

And could they be of any help in healing Last Order?

(That motherfucker Aiwass told me to go to Russia. Was that related to this? Aiwass did say there was a key in a 'different set of laws' than Academy City…)

He thought about it, but couldn't come up with an answer.

He ended that train of thought and moved to thinking about what he should do next.

(The trail leading to what these pieces of parchment are via Russian means was cut off here, so I guess my next route will have to be with Academy City's underground organization. If they're interfering, they must understand how valuable they are.)

As he did not know exactly who had the necessary information, there was a danger of extended fighting. With the limited battery power for his electrode, that was not a good thing for Accelerator, but he didn't really care. He would continue crushing his targets even if he had to crawl across the snow to do it.

His thoughts were exceedingly hostile.

He then recalled the weight of Last Order's unconscious form and gave a bitter

smile.

“Shit…”

He had been trying to hide it up until then.

No matter how bloody a world he lived in, he had wanted to keep her from seeing it.

(…I can’t keep myself in check anymore.)

Had he not spoken that last line out loud because he had not wanted Last Order to hear it? Or had it been because of the bit of unease that had passed through him?

At any rate, he could not stop there.

Academy City had many large supersonic airplanes. They could fly through the air at over 7000 kph, so they could reach the other side of the globe in only 2 hours. If the people who attacked that base used one of them, he would no longer be able to pursue them. If he was going to get a surprise attack in, he would have to hurry up and find them.

He had no time to hesitate.

But Accelerator stopped moving when he was about to turn around.

There were a number of figures standing there.

The air force base was a wide and flat area primarily made up of runways. There wasn’t much space for people to hide, but about 10 figures had appeared surrounding Accelerator at some point. No, it wasn’t just 10.

There were around 20 men and women who were all wearing identical clothing.

Accelerator frowned at the fact that they seemed to be wearing some kind of old religious habits as opposed to military uniforms that were collections of cutting edge technology. He felt the same pressure as from Unabara or the parchments.

One of them spoke in Russian.

“Are you with Academy City?”

“What about you? Are you the ones who attacked this base?”

“So you don’t deny it.”

The man lowered his center of gravity.

Accelerator took it as a sign that he was preparing for a fight to the death.

“I don’t have time,” Accelerator said while reaching up for the switch at his neck and putting away his retractable cane. “I’ll be keeping this short, okay?”

Part 8

Fiamma of the Right.

Vento of the Front.

The confrontation between those two monsters did not involve them suddenly jumping up to the roof of a tall building and having a high speed battle that normal eyes could not keep track of.

As they glared at each other, they silently moved horizontally. They did so slowly and smoothly. While maintaining the same distance between them, they seemed to move side by side as they moved to the center of the snowy plaza.

There were no easy-to-understand explosions or beams of light.

Even so, the people were frozen in fear due to Fiamma’s previous attack. The mass of people naturally distanced itself from around Vento and Fiamma like water overflowing from a bathtub as a giant sank down into it.

Kamijou could not move.

It would be better if he helped.

Between Elizalina, Lessar, and Sasha Kreutzev, he knew who he should rescue.

However, he could not move.

His mental state was similar to someone trying to rescue someone next to a bomb that could go off at any time. His focus was naturally stolen by the "bomb".

He heard a slight noise.

He thought a gust of wind had blown and next thing he knew Vento was holding something like a hammer wrapped in barbed wire in her right hand. The hammer was about a meter long and its end struck the ground.

Fiamma's eyebrows moved slightly.

"How very odd."

"What is?"

"God's Right Seat cannot use normal magic. We can only use spells that have been extremely regulated for our use. You hold the Divine Punishment spell that paralyzed Academy City, but the spiritual item that supports its activation was shattered on September 30th. And yet…"

"Is it really that surprising that I can create mystical phenomena like this?" said Vento as she rested the heavy hammer on her shoulder.

That's right. It may be easy to forget given the ridiculous feats they could perform, but Fiamma and Vento were human. They could not perform supernatural phenomena that ignored the laws of physics without using something. There had to be laws behind Vento pulling the hammer out of nothingness.

In other words…

(Vento just used magic…?)

Kamijou's face paled as he recalled the magic she had used to knock almost every resident of Academy City unconscious.

However, Fiamma did not seem too surprised.

"Well, that still means you haven't succeeded in restoring your Divine Punishment. And even if you had, you cannot defeat me using that methodology."

"I never thought of using that against someone like you who was completely warped even in your way of thinking about malice and hostility."

"Then what do you think you can do?"

"Currently, you cannot wield the perfected version of your power as Michael."

"True. That's what I want Sasha Kreutzev and Imagine Breaker for."

"That right arm has to have limits on its use," said Vento interrupting his casual speech.

"…"

Fiamma stopped speaking, but Vento's voice continued.

"Because you played around with those small fries, it has already begun to disintegrate into the air. There is a theory behind the superhuman powers magicians use and members of God's Right Seat cannot just use spells other than the special ones that have been adjusted for our use. Once your stock runs out, you are nothing more than a regular human."

A smile leaked out.

However, it was not on Vento's face.

Fiamma's lips curved up slightly.

"Don't tell me…"

An eerie pressure was emitted into the air around him.

He spoke as he slowly moved the fingers on his right arm.

“…you thought you could make up for the difference between us with just that.”

“No.”

The handle of the hammer resting on Vento’s shoulder floated up slightly.

It was only a few centimeters.

“We’re only just now getting to the truly interesting stuff,” she announced along with that slight movement.

Immediately afterwards, Fiamma of the Right was knocked straight back.

Kamijou was a few dozen meters away, but not even he could grasp what had happened.

The event had not been unusual due to its speed. It was the scale.

All of a sudden, a giant structure had split through the snowy earth in the center of the plaza. The object that came up diagonally was a sailing vessel made of transparent ice. It was about 40 meters long, but not all of the ship could be seen. That 40 meter figure only applied to the part visible at that time.

A cannon made of ice on the side of the ship aimed towards Fiamma.

Instead of the flames of gunpowder, ice powder shot out along with an explosive noise.

That attack of ice was the antithesis of the flames that the name Fiamma referred to and it was not merely a cannonball that was fired. It was a transparent anchor. The 2 or 3 meter mass struck Fiamma’s body and knocked him a few kilometers away.

After a few moments, the noise of the impact belatedly resounded throughout the plaza.

Ignoring the uproar occurring around her, Vento spoke.

“Did you know that Biagio Busoni commanded the Queen of the Adriatic and the Queen’s Fleet that protected it at Chioggia?”

Kamijou wasn’t sure if there was a reason behind it or if she just liked doing it, but Vento was spinning the giant hammer around in one hand as she spoke. Her voice was almost at a whisper, but it was likely being sent to Fiamma’s ears via magical means.

“That was one of the Ten Holy Spirit Spells and I was the one that readjusted it to the point that it could be used. I can’t control the entirety of the Queen of the Adriatic, but I have the affinity to control one portion of that great fleet.”

Kamijou heard a jangling noise.

It was coming from Vento’s tongue.

“Oh, and one more thing.”

A thin chain like one that would be used for a necklace stretched down from her tongue.

On its end hung a cross.

It was transparent as if it were made of ice.

The decorative cross looked somehow similar to an anchor.

“There are quite a few stories in the Christian Church of storms in the sea being calmed to protect a ship. For example, there was the one with the Son of God and the one with Saint Nicholas. The element I rule is the wind or the air, but storms on the sea are a mix of the wind and the water. Using those stories, I am able to partially interfere with the water. …Unlike the exclusivity of your fire, I can create complex and great effects like that.”

There was an explosive noise.

It was the sound of the giant ice anchor exploding a few kilometers away while it was caught on Fiamma.

It was not just an explosion caused by gunpowder.

Hundreds of meter-long ice stakes were created in the explosion. The tips of the ice stakes were sharper than a steel spear and thousands upon thousands of them continued to explode outwards in every direction. The ground was gouged out and a large amount of snow and black soil was blown into the air. It was fortunate that the surrounding area was wilderness. With those numbers and that destructive force, even an underground shelter would have been turned to Swiss cheese.

The people in the plaza did not understand what was going on. However, it seemed they were easily susceptible to the hostility and killing intent packed into the mountain of ice blades that had suddenly appeared. Some of them even folded their hands and desperately prayed.

It was impossible to tell what had become of Fiamma from there.

Even if they headed closer and investigated, it might be hard to tell.

That was how much destructive force had been sent his way.

Vento of the Front indeed possessed the extraordinary power of God's Right Seat.

"If you had put together a strategy focusing solely on killing me, the result may have been a bit different, but you could not have defended against that strike with that right arm of yours disintegrating into the air like that," she said with her tongue sticking out as if she were ridiculing him. "You wasted too much ammo, you fool. …Although, I suppose I'm wasting my breath here."

"Oh, really? I'd say I'm much more careful with my possession than you give me credit for," said a voice of unknown origin cutting Vento off.

Immediately afterwards, the loud sound of the distant mountain of ice blades being blown to pieces from within was heard. It went beyond the level of an eruption. The overwhelming force did not even allow the remnants to rain back down to the ground. The shattered pieces were swept away in the wind.

The shattered ice flew in every direction in clumps a few meters long. One of those directions was towards the plaza Kamijou and the others were in. It was like a bombardment of shells. Multiple buildings were crushed and the people in the plaza lay on the ground covering their heads with their hands. Screams and

shouts could be heard in response to the unreasonable disaster.

As Vento looked at the area a few kilometers away, her eyebrows twisted in confusion.

A beam of light shot out.

It came from such a distance that Kamijou and the others couldn't see the details, but Kamijou knew that it had come from an arm. It had come from the third arm that had newly appeared from Fiamma's shoulder.

"It seems I cannot avoid having it disintegrate into the air, but I have succeeded in fixing it in that state."

Something flashed.

It was a reflection from the light of the beam his third arm had fired.

The reflection could be seen on something in Fiamma's right hand.

Its details could not be seen from that distance either, but Kamijou could guess that it was Index's remote control spiritual item.

That device allowed Fiamma to freely pull out any information he wanted from the knowledge of the 103,000 grimoires.

"To put it bluntly, I no longer have any limits."

Vento did not stay silent.

Explosive noises sounded from the cannons on the nearby ship. A second and third anchor cut through the air heading for Fiamma.

That ridiculous barrage had been what had sent Fiamma flying a few kilometers away just a bit earlier.

However, Fiamma did not even attempt to evade.

He merely swung his right arm lightly.

"I do not need destructive force."

That was all.

The sound of one of the anchors shattering split through the air. The one anchor was destroyed in midair and the other impaled into the ground in a spot it should not have hit. This caused an explosion a few dozen meters across to occur. The scene looked like some kind of joke. Pieces of the scenery like mountains and rivers were blown away.

“If I touch my enemy, it’s over, so I don’t need to put any effort into destroying them.”

“Tch!!”

Vento hurriedly held up her hammer and muttered something under her breath. She may have had some other trump card. Kamijou did not know very much about magic, but it felt like she was moving as if making a figure out of a string in her hands at high speed.

But…

“I do not need speed.”

A cold voice cut her off.

Forcefully.

Exceedingly overwhelming.

“If I swing, I hit my enemy, so I don’t need to put any effort into hitting them.”

Kamijou did not know what happened.

The next thing he knew, Fiamma, who was supposed to be a few kilometers away, was situated right under Vento’s chin and her body was blown away an instant later.

Fiamma’s movements did not end there.

The chain attached to Vento’s tongue trailed behind her as she flew backwards. Fiamma casually grabbed it in midair. The action was as carefree as someone

grabbing a scrap of paper being blown in the wind.

Vento's body was still flying backwards.

Of course, the thin chain could not support Vento's weight. With a tearing noise, the piercing holding the chain in was torn from Vento's tongue.

She did not even have time to let out a scream.

The woman wearing all yellow continued flying back a few dozen meters. She struck the center of the ice ship that had appeared in the center of the plaza. The giant piece of art that symbolized a bombardment was broken in half horizontally from her impact.

Finally, Vento let out a scream.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

"Quit exaggerating. It's not like your whole tongue was ripped out. It was just a little tear. And the ice ship's defensive spell only started to disappear when you hit it, so you just barely managed to receive the benefit of that."

As Fiamma boredly watched Vento lying on the ground a few dozen meters away screaming, he lightly tossed up the chain he had ripped out. He swung the third arm sticking out from his right shoulder and the clear cross shattered.

The remnants of the broken ice ship collapsed into the plaza and the surrounding villagers frantically moved out of the way. Of course, Fiamma did not look over in that direction at all.

Vento tried to stand up as red stains dripped down onto the white snow below her.

"Gbh!? What…!?"

"It's quite simple. What I possess is not the right arm itself but the power that should reside in the right arm. The right is used in most Christian rituals. Archangel Michael cut down the leader of the fallen angels with his right hand, the Son of God healed the sick with his right hand, the Bible was written with

the right hand, and, well, there are many others. In other words, I can freely use a great number of Christian supernatural phenomena. You can figure out the rest. You're not so incompetent you can't do that."

"Ridiculous… That right arm is…."

"That's right. It's incomplete. Normally, I wouldn't be showing it off like this. However, that isn't something you should be excited about. God's Right Seat is…no, the entire world is in an ambiguous state like that."

"…?"

"During Angel Fall, it seems the angel that appeared in an imperfect form named itself Misha."

That alone, Fiamma said in a melancholic way.

"Mikhail is another name for Michael. It is not a name fitting for Gabriel. And yet that archangel gave its name, the name that states its role created by God, as Misha. Do you understand how important that fact is?"

Fiamma continued on.

"Vento of the Front bears wind, yellow, and Uriel while Terra of the Left bears earth, green, and Raphael, but that is slightly off. Normally, wind goes with Raphael and earth goes with Uriel."

Vento's face held an expression that looked like her heart had stopped.

Her expression seemed to be saying that the mental damage of having the pillar of her heart toppled was greater than the physical damage to her tongue.

"No one realizes it." Fiamma's words alone resounded through the area. "No one realizes it and yet the world continues on. Magic is activated. Did you know that all four of the major elements have begun to distort slightly? This world is in much more of a crisis than you realize. Someone has to do something about it."

"You…don't mean…"Vento shook her head as she spoke what she had no proof of. "Angel Fall left that much of an after effect?"

“Quite the opposite. It was because that distortion to the great laws existed that an opening existed that allowed such a ridiculous spell to be activated in the first place. …Do you understand now? That’s enough then, right?”

With a smile on his face, Fiamma swung his third arm.

It was an exceedingly primitive motion.

There was a space of a few dozen meters between them, but that meant nothing to his ridiculous power.

But Kamijou charged in from the side towards Fiamma before he could finish the action.

“I do not need to…”

Fiamma’s response was actually quite simple.

“…turn around.”

He changed the trajectory of his arm.

As if it were fulfilling its natural role, Kamijou’s body was knocked away. It was a primitive strike like swinging a wooden rod, but that was why there could be no doubts about it. Pain ran through Kamijou’s organs and even his backbone. But it was odd. That strike had shattered that giant anchor and destroyed the ship itself in a single strike, so it should have smashed a human body to pieces.

Perhaps its given role had been automatically selected to emit the perfect amount of power to knock away Kamijou Touma.

Fiamma was not like a Saint that pushed through with power and speed.

Using a battle in an RPG as an example...

What if there was a ridiculous command of “defeat” among the usual commands of “fight”, “defend”, “magic”, and “item”.

Most likely, Fiamma would respond in the same way to Kanzaki or Acqua and he would defeat them just the same. It didn’t matter if his speed or strength were

inferior. His exceedingly overwhelming “power” ignored any actions taken by his opponent and simply crushed them. It was like pushing a giant wall along to flatten a sand hill made by a child.

He could not win in a direct fight.

But then, he could not fall back either.

If Kamijou did not do anything, Fiamma would finish off Vento. He might not let Lessar and Elizalina live either. He would take Sasha Kreutzev and leave.

And most importantly, Fiamma held Index’s remote control spiritual item.

“…”

Kamijou’s lip must have split because he could taste blood.

Ignoring that, he stood up once more.

He tightly clenched his fist.

“You’re a wonderful person,” Fiamma said glancing over to Kamijou while clearly keeping Vento in range. “How many people have you stood up for so far? How many incidents have you resolved by swinging that fist of yours? You truly are a wonderful person. But the most wonderful thing of all is how you have been provoked by others into heading into peril yourself and, in the end, you have accumulated all of the fruits and rewards of your actions for yourself.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Are you sure that your actions are truly right?”

Fiamma slowly moved his arm.

His third arm.

It was an exceedingly irregular object that could not be described with just magic or with just science.

“There is no fundamental difference between my actions that you are so angry about and the actions you yourself have taken. I am wielding my right arm to

resolve my own problem while you wield your right arm to resolve the problems that occur around you. We both do it by shattering something that someone worked desperately to obtain. There is no difference in our methods. And I am sure. …I know that my actions will bring about absolute good."

"…Are you just telling me to ignore the fact that Index is suffering for that?" Kamijou responded without hesitation. "Fuck that. You're saying that using the people of the Roman Catholic Church for your own convenience and backing the coup d'etat in England with pressure from France is for absolute good? Is there something wrong with your head?"

"So you're saying you would be doing good by stopping me?"

"This isn't an issue of 'good'."

"…"

"Index is suffering. How many people do you think are crying because of this fucking war you started? Is it so strange to want to stand up against that? Is it so wrong to want to fight for a girl who can't even open her eyes? At the very least, I'm not going to listen to the complaints of some bastard who delights in the suffering of others."

But…

"Truly wonderful."

Fiamma held his right hand out towards Kamijou while smiling.

A small tube-shaped device lay within that hand.

It was Index's remote control spiritual item.

Kamijou's expression changed and Fiamma grinned widely as he spoke.

"Is that really something you can say before a nun you have been continually lying to?"

Kamijou's shoulders gave a slight twitch.

(It couldn’t be…)

“At times, I am connected to her consciousness through this remote control spiritual item. The information I see and hear is passed on to her at those times.”

(He…)

“Now then. Can you say the same thing in this situation? There is no problem with being wrong. But if you truly believe what you said, then why did you continue to put on that shameless act before her?”

(He’s realized it…?)

A chill ran down his back.

It was not a feeling regarding the danger he himself was in.

It was the feeling of the invisible pillar supporting a certain girl slowly crumbling away.

Meanwhile, Fiamma lightly touched his temple with one of his normal fingers and smiled.

“You are the only one that can fully understand what you are hiding. She is the only one that can judge how she feels about those things. You seem to have been protecting her from it for your own satisfaction, but I look forward to seeing whether she judges that to have been a good thing or not.”

He swung his third arm.

Kamijou was frozen in place due to Fiamma’s words, so he could not react.

However, he was not aiming for Kamijou.

Fiamma’s strike hit Sasha Kreutzev who was still collapsed in the plaza.

“One for now.”

The next thing Kamijou knew, Fiamma’s third arm was holding the small girl.

He had completely ignored the distance between them.

The arm had shot out like a whip and wrapped back up like a chameleon's tongue.

"!? Fiamma!!" Kamijou yelled having come back to his senses.

"I'd like to get the second now too, but there is a problem of compatibility," Fiamma responded in such a carefree way that it sounded like he was about to start whistling. "I want to completely seal the angel medium to transport it, but your right hand's special effect would get in the way of that. It would be difficult to transport both of you at the same time."

Fiamma turned his back on Kamijou while holding Sasha like a bag entangled in a branch.

"Don't let yourself die too easily."

Kamijou ignored Fiamma's words and charged for him.

But Fiamma did not even turn around.

"I need that right hand of yours, after all."

There was an explosive wind and Fiamma was gone by the time Kamijou could negate it with his right hand.

With the danger gone, commotion returned to the plaza.

Kamijou alone stayed motionless amid the scenery that had once more begun to move.

Fiamma's words echoed within his head.

"I look forward to seeing whether she judges that to have been a good thing or not."

Part 9

Hamazura Shiage wandered around on the snow.

He had originally been in a building, but he hadn't been able to stay still. He wasn't headed anywhere in particular. He merely headed back and forth on the snow trying to do something about the pressure that had built up in his gut.

He was in a small village.

The village only had about 50 log houses. People who did not live there weren't able to distinguish between the private houses and the stores. In fact, all the buildings seemed to be both.

"It seems they're at the limit of what they can do for that girl," said a tall man speaking to Hamazura.

He was the man who had brought Hamazura and Takitsubo to the village in exchange for the fuel inside the stolen car.

His name seemed to be Digurv.

"These are the effects of a drug from Academy City where technology is 20 or 30 years removed from here. There's no way a small clinic like this is going to know how to treat her and it seems there is a good chance doing the wrong thing would make her condition even worse."

"I know," Hamazura said shaking his head with an anxious expression. "Even so, she hadn't had a chance to sleep on a proper bed until now. Please. You just need to stabilize her a bit. I don't want to see her suffering."

"We can do that, but what are you planning to do in the long run?"

Hamazura remained silent to Digurv's question.

Takitsubo had said there may be some secret reason behind Academy City's invasion of Russia and that if he could grasp whatever that was and get in a

position where he could influence the outcome of the war, he may be able to negotiate on an even standing with the large organization of Academy City.

He had no choice but to search for it.

He had to head alone for the center of the world war before Takitsubo Rikou was absolutely done for.

That huge wall of a task before him was making him feel depressed, so Hamazura changed the subject.

He looked around the area.

“Everyone seems to be in a hurry.”

“Yes, they do. It seems a nearby village was attacked by the Russian army, but they were apparently saved by an Asian boy while en route to the concentration camp. More people fled here than normally live here.”

That may have been why they were so low on supplies.

“…Is your generator doing okay?”

“For now. We were supposed to get periodic shipments of supplies and fuel, but the route has been cut off by the Russian troops stationed on the roads. To be honest, if you hadn’t come by there, we would have been in a really bad situation.”

That was a problem that would not have existed if the war between Academy City and Russia had not occurred.

“Sorry… This is our fault.”

For an instant a ridiculous delusion passed through the back of Hamazura’s mind.

What if that large scale war had started because he and Takitsubo had fled to Russia? He knew quite well that the two of them were nowhere near that valuable, but he couldn’t remove that last little thorn of doubt.

But Digurv shook his head.

“No, it isn’t. I apologize if I made you feel uncomfortable. I understand.”

“?”

“This village was being targeted by the Russian army since before World War III began. We are quite near the border with the Elizalina Alliance. This is an excellent location to build a base for invading, so we have been faced with the threat of losing this land many times. And it isn’t just on the level of land speculation. They have even scattered landmines from transport planes on the pretext of preventing an invasion from the Alliance. Russia may have equipment to locate the landmines and collect them, but we do not.”

Hamazura had difficulty imagining such a thing happening.

After all, it would be unthinkable for the government to do something like that in Japan.

“Don’t worry about it. We treat them like point stickers. Mines are sort of similar. We can recover them and hand them over to an NGO in exchange for food and supplies. It may be safer to detonate them there, but it seems they want more obvious results from helping bring peace.”

Digurv pointed towards a small building on the edge of the village. That was where the landmines were put after they had been dug up from the ground and their fuse pins had been fixed.

“…Does Russia really want to invade the Elizalina Alliance that badly? What exactly are they after there?”

“Who knows. It may not be a definite threat and the Russian government is just afraid of the country being split apart even further. At the very least, I don’t think the Alliance is any military threat to Russia. I just don’t think they have enough military force to go to war.”

Even though he lived so nearby, he didn’t know everything about that country. And Digurv seemed to be speaking as if he had been told this by someone else. He was a civilian. It wasn’t easy for him to get any more information than what was shown on the news.

That was when Hamazura heard the sound of someone walking on the snow.

Digurv turned in the direction of the noise and then immediately shoved Hamazura down onto the snow. Hamazura didn't even have time to cry out in protest. Digurv pulled on Hamazura's clothes and frantically jumped behind a building.

"What? Did something happen?"

"It's a Russian soldier," Digurv responded in a purposefully quiet voice as he held his index finger up to his lips. With an expression of shock, Hamazura slowly peeked out from behind the wall. Sure enough, he saw a man in his 20's who was wearing a military uniform and standing on the snow.

Digurv's expression turned even more serious.

"We do have anti-intruder sensors set up around the village. Did one of them fail?"

"…Hey. You said the Russian army is after this village's land, right?"

However, something odd happened before Hamazura got an answer to his question.

The Russian soldier who had been walking along sluggishly suddenly collapsed onto the snow.

Hamazura and Digurv exchanged glances, but the Russian soldier showed no sign of moving. After watching him for a full 30 seconds, they slowly headed out from behind the building.

Even after they made it right up next to the soldier, he did not attack.

When they flipped the face-down soldier onto his back, they noticed his face had turned blue and purple in places.

"He has frostbite," said Digurv.

The soldier looked up at Hamazura and Digurv with his almost closed eyes and muttered something in Russian. Hearing that, Digurv looked over at Hamazura.

“He asked us to help him. He said he was carrying ‘something’ to a nearby air force base, but the base was attacked by Academy City before he got there. It seems the cold was too much for him without his outdoor gear. …We certainly have gotten a lot of visitors today.”

Hamazura’s face seemed to twitch when he heard the term Academy City, but he couldn’t stay focused solely on that.

“…What do we do? Do we save him? He’s a bit like an uninvited guest.”

“Don’t ask that question with that look in your eyes. It’s clear he’s asking for help,” Digurv said as he helped the frostbitten soldier up and let him lean on his shoulder.

Hamazura helped support the man as well and was shocked at how cold his skin was.

“Hey, Digurv. Is this really okay for you all?”

“As much as I’d like to be coldhearted, abandoning him wouldn’t change anything.”

They were headed for the small clinic where Takitsubo was resting.

Hamazura didn’t know exactly how frostbite was treated, but he guessed that taking him before a heater or a fireplace would do him a lot of good.

(…He was carrying something, hm?)

If Academy City had attacked for a reason other than the official reason for the war… In other words, if they had attacked because they were targeting whatever it was that was being brought to the air force base, that something might work as a means of negotiating with Academy City.

And an Academy City force had attacked the air force base that something was supposed to be headed for.

Didn’t that mean it was possible it hadn’t made it to the unit’s hands yet?

Hamazura glanced over at the side of the Russian soldier’s face.

He doubted an amateur high school student like himself would be able to get any information from a professional soldier who regularly trained and who had experience in real battle. However, he may have a chance with the man in such a weakened state.

After calculating that much out, Hamazura spoke.

“…God dammit. I wouldn’t be able to look Takitsubo in the eye if I did that.”

“?”

Digurv looked puzzled, but Hamazura said nothing more.

There was more than one way.

There had to be some other opportunity he could use to negotiate with Academy City that did not involve using the misfortune of others.

(For now, I just have to get him somewhere warm.)

However, something rushed out of the clinic just as they were about to open the door.

It was a girl of about 10. She must have been one of the people who had been rescued from the trucks instead of one of the residents of the village. Hamazura was usually able to distinguish them based on the style of their clothes. She spoke for quite a bit upon seeing Digurv. She seemed to be passing on some kind of message and Digurv frowned. Her words might not have been getting across to him very well because she was so worked up about something.

However, Digurv’s expression finally changed once he seemed to figure out what she was saying. He left the frostbitten soldier to Hamazura and rushed into the clinic.

Hamazura had no idea what was going on, but he entered the clinic with the soldier.

He was nervous.

After all, the girl had come rushing out of the clinic Takitsubo Rikou was resting

in.

Something may have happened.

He had a bad feeling.

However, his expectations were wrong.

The reality was much worse.

“What’s going on!? Did something happen!?” Hamazura yelled out in Japanese as he lowered the Russian soldier to the floor next to the electric heater near the entrance.

Digurv had been speaking quickly, but he finally turned around towards Hamazura. He was moving around like someone preparing to skip town.

“…Privateers.”

“What?”

“It’s the term for a military system from the middle ages. Governments would authorize pirates to attack ships from enemy nations in order to both cause financial problems for the other country as well as benefit from the valuables brought back to their own country. Meanwhile, the pirates would be protected by that government. It seems some pirates were even given the title of a knight.”

“What about it?”

“The Russian army is still using privateers to this day,” Digurv said with bloodshot eyes and with tension and sweat on his face. “There are blank units within the army. They have no official members. The privateers are often paid to attack enemy forces. There has always been a need for missions to cut off enemy supply lines and indirectly lessen the enemy’s military forces, but the attack missions targeting lightly equipped people were not popular and it started spreading needless dissatisfaction. From what I have heard, this led to a dedicated unit being formed. It seems they are used for the more dirty missions. I don’t really know how much of this is true though.”

Digurv continued speaking.

“They are a group of people who want to act violently and who have military experience centered around Western Europe. I’ve heard that they recruit over the internet. Apparently, it’s pretty popular because they can make quite a bit of money in a short period of time and they are not bound by military regulations. On top of that, they are given Russia’s best equipment and sent out on some of the dirtier missions. If it comes down to it, the unit can be immediately done away with even in the paperwork. Any ‘soldiers that caused some problems’ will be recorded as having been thrown into a detention facility and the actual soldiers will have gone back to their own countries. That way, missions that would bring criticism from the international community can be carried out smoothly.”

“You’re kidding… Are you saying that thugs like that are headed here?”

Hamazura looked over at the Russian soldier in front of the electric heater.

“W-wait. We have a member of the Russian army here. They wouldn’t just destroy the entire village, right? They’d at least check the place out first, right?”

“These are privateers. They don’t care about any of that,” Digurv said shaking his head.

Even the Russian soldier gave what sounded like a moan at hearing the term “privateer”.

“We’ve already had a few attacks from privateers,” Digurv said in almost a whisper.

He had already said that the Russian army was after the land the village was on in order to create a base from which to invade the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations. And he had said that they had scattered landmines from transport planes.

“However, we have always managed to detect their approach and run away before they can actually attack. They destroy all the buildings and steal everything of value, but we managed to divide things up to leave decoys. That left us with enough left over to rebuild with.”

“Th-then, we just have to…”

“…The situation is different now. Because of World War III, the Russian army has given the privateers new equipment. We can’t get away this time. We can’t escape on foot from the armored vehicles they are using and we do not have the firepower needed to resist them.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding…”

Digurv had said they didn’t have the fuel needed to run the generator. It was possible that also meant they could not use any vehicles to escape on.

They couldn’t use their usual pattern.

What would happen then?

“A distance out from here, we have steel towers that can detect someone’s approach using magnetism. One has been blown away. It was most likely the privateers. They’ve gotten close, so we don’t have time. They don’t care about war treaties, so they won’t capture or restrain us when they break in. They’ll just kill us.”

Hamazura looked over at the wall of the clinic.

There was an assault rifle leaning up against the wall. It had wooden pieces on it. He wasn’t sure of the technical name, but he thought it was an AK-something-or-other. He had been surprised to see it when he had first brought Takitsubo into the clinic, but it seemed they were more ubiquitous in that area than fire extinguishers.

But he couldn’t.

He couldn’t defeat the privateers by running around holding that thing. They knew of the situation, so they would be taking preparations to slaughter everyone in the village.

There was no way he could fight.

He had used handguns a fair bit in the back alleys in Japan, but he had never even touched a gun that big. They were probably used in a completely different way.

“What do we do…? Is there anywhere we can flee to!?”

“That’s what we’re trying to figure out now.”

Part 10

Accelerator thought quietly while at the remains of the Russian air force base that had been attacked by an underground organization from Academy City.

He looked at the dozen or so men and women who were surrounding him.

They were an odd bunch.

He didn’t think they were just Russian soldiers. They were wearing dark religious habits and they held special decorative swords, spears, staffs, axes, and other similar objects. Normally, he wouldn’t have thought those were very logical weapons to choose. They seemed to be an era or two behind, but they blended into the Russian battlefield that was the remains of the base that was spewing flames and smoke. He felt the same pressure from them that he did from Unabara.

There was something about them.

But that wasn’t his top priority.

He held a girl known as Last Order.

She was unconscious and lying limply in his arm.

Because he was holding her in one arm, he might damage Last Order if he used his reflection over his entire body. He had to focus on how he used his power.

He walked on his own two legs.

To make sure he did not hurt Last Order, he intentionally lowered his defenses.

“…”

Accelerator thought for a second and frowned.

Then he took action.

He focused his vector transformation power in his right hand for the purpose of attacking.

With a tremendous noise, he altered the vectors for his leg strength to shoot forward like a thrown spear. He headed for the man closest to him.

He stuck his right hand forward.

He just barely brushed the man, but the man flew over 10 meters before landing.

The man yelled out a word as he flew backwards.

“Vodyanoy!!”

It was most likely a codename.

The group faltered at the sight of the sudden damage to their companion, but they started moving shortly thereafter. The woman standing diagonally back in Accelerator’s blind spot—probably the Vodyanoy the man had mentioned—made an odd motion with her fingers.

Immediately afterwards, the snow around her melted and turned into a spear of water that flew towards Accelerator.

The mysterious attack was not from a bullet or a bomb.

A normal person would have been too surprised to react and simply been skewered. However, Accelerator was not bothered by it. He himself was a mass of the mysterious.

He held up his right hand, the sole area his reflection was activated on.

The water spear was smashed to pieces.

The water turned to a rainbow of light that flowed diagonally back from his right hand. It acted as a wall of pressure that knocked away 4 of 5 of Vodyanoy's comrades.

Accelerator had blocked the attack, but he frowned.

He couldn't figure it out.

If his reflection had succeeded, the water spear should have head straight back at Vodyanoy and pierced her arm. Instead, it had gone astray and had disintegrated into a rainbow of light. It had been an odd phenomenon. It hadn't been something like steam created from water or ice. Accelerator had caused the reflection but he didn't understand the process by which it had turned to light.

(…What…?)

It felt like having something you had grabbed with the tips of your fingers slipping away.

When he reflected teleportation powers, a strange phenomenon occurred in the 3 dimensional world, but this had felt entirely different.

However, he did not have time to think about it.

Vodyanoy seemed confused, too. As if to check what had happened, she created the exact same water spear once more. She watched him carefully as the attack hit as if looking for a way through his defenses.

This was convenient for Accelerator.

He held his palm forward and the water spear turned to rainbow-colored light once more.

However, something was different from the previous time.

One portion of the rainbow-colored light almost scratched Last Order's cheek.

"…You need to be careful."

A tremendous noise rang out.

It was the sound of Accelerator lightly stepping on the ground and causing a huge tsunami of snow to rise up. It swallowed up Vodyanoy and the others. Unlike a normal tsunami, it had overwhelming speed. It was faster than Vodyanoy and the others and the wall of snow knocked the attackers unconscious.

“Yeah, the right hand just doesn’t suit me.”

Checking that he had taken care of all the enemies, Accelerator flipped the electrode’s switch and thought for a bit.

What had that water spear been?

The grasp of its vectors had been completely different from the scientific powers developed in Academy City.

Different vectors.

Different laws.

Accelerator was reminded of the pieces of parchment he had found in the freight train.

They had asked him if he had attacked the base and if he was with Academy City. That meant they were likely with Russia and not Academy City’s underworld.

They may know something about the parchment.

They might even know what the pieces of parchment were used for.

There was a chance that would lead to a means of saving Last Order from the critical situation she was in.

(What a pain in the ass…)

It seemed he had to speak with the attackers he had knocked unconscious.

He had to make sure he didn’t inadvertently kill them.

Suddenly, Accelerator stopped moving and looked up.

One of Academy City's supersonic bombers was flying through the sky. That alone was fairly common due to the war. However, the bomber dropped something above the ruins of the base. It wasn't a parachute. It was something equipped with glider wings that looked like a complex hang glider.

He could see a human figure.

He didn't think any further than that.

It was an enemy.

He clicked his tongue once as he came to that conclusion.

Immediately afterwards, Accelerator hit the switch on his electrode and kicked some pebbles at his feet.

With an explosive noise, the glider was shot down.

However, the figure did not fall down and strike the ground.

He saw some purple electricity sparking.

The figure's speed lowered in stages as it fell and finally landed softly on the ground.

(…The person detonated the air?)

Accelerator gave that guess as to what the figure had done, but it didn't surprise him.

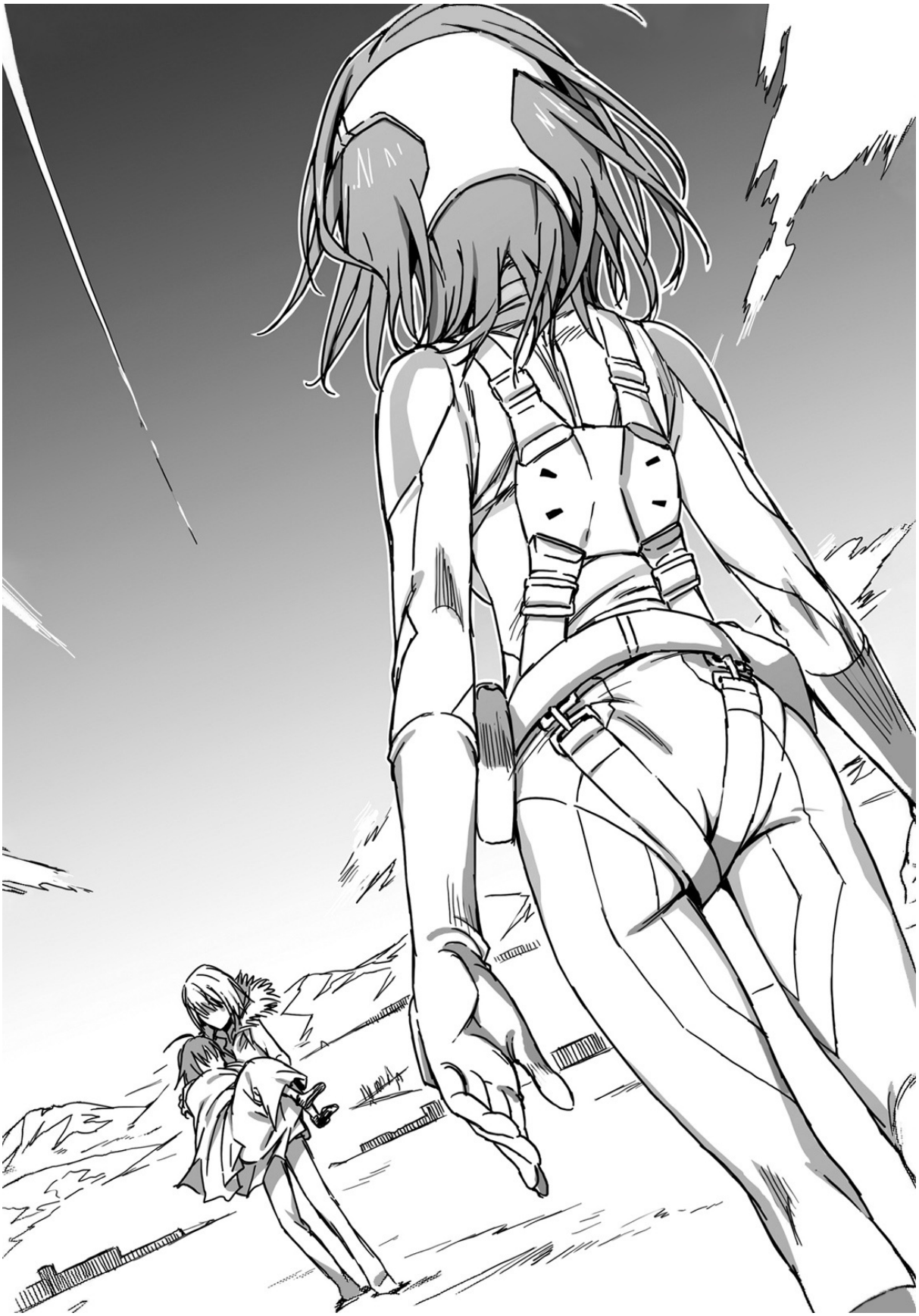
After all, he himself had once jumped out of a bomber over the French city of Avignon without a parachute.

What he was interested in was the power the figure had used.

Electricity.

And it was a power Accelerator was quite familiar with.

“Who are you?”



The figure was dressed in white battle clothing that matched the snowy plain. The figure had special goggles that covered its entire face like a mask. He couldn't tell where the figure's eyes or nose were. The flat mask had nothing on it but 8 small lenses placed in a circle like the face of an analog clock. The figure's clothing had no gaps in it and could have hidden all sorts of things within. As such, he couldn't be sure at first glance, but the figure appeared to be a girl of about high school age.

An odd nervousness ran through Accelerator.

The white skin of her ear that could be seen sticking out from the mask and the swaying of the brown shoulder-length hair gave Accelerator a very bad feeling.

That's right. He had a feeling that she looked a lot like the small girl he held in his arms.

"Who are you!?"

The white figure did not remove her mask.

He could not see her expression.

The lenses arranged like a clock face moved slightly and she responded.

"Would it be enough to tell you Misaka is from the Third Season?"

Accelerator thought his breathing had completely stopped.

However, the girl who had referred to herself as "Misaka" continued.

"Hi there. Misaka has come to kill you, #1. Misaka doesn't really care about what happens with this war. No orders like that were input into her. Misaka's goal is nothing more than killing the #1. That is the reason—the sole reason—Misaka was taken from the cultivation device."

Between the lines 2

She tried to look into it, but it wasn't really something she could just look into.

(…Well, I suppose that should be obvious.)

Misaka Mikoto looked away from the PDA and sighed.

She had been trying to take classified information from the Bank, but the situation was different from usual. The security had been tightened quite a bit. The fact that they were at war was cropping up in places she hadn't expected at all.

That was just how valuable the information she was trying to get at was.

If the details of a mission were leaked out, a lot of people's lives would be at risk.

But she had managed to get some information.

She had been able to get a few things that weren't related to the war.

During the large-scale sports festival known as the Daihaseisai, Misaka Mikoto had watched Kamijou Touma's school compete. In other words, she knew the name of his school. She had checked the attendance records for the school and he hadn't been there since the day he had called her "from London".

When she checked the records further, she found out he had missed quite a few days even before that. He was definitely going to have to take supplementary lessons. It seemed very odd to her. Normally, there would have been some signs of him struggling in an attempt to prevent that from happening. It was just too weird that he hadn't been there a single time since that day.

That boy might really not be in Academy City.

If what he had said on the phone was true, he might not even be in Japan.

England was a good distance from Russia where the heart of the war was, but that was no proof that he wouldn't get caught up in the war. After all, the war was on a worldwide scale. Safe places were the exception. Academy City may have seemed peaceful, but that was because the ballistic missiles were being intercepted. Trying to find a "safe place" may have been hopeless.

(…What do I do? Do I try to go deeper for information because I know he's in a certain level of danger?)

Mikoto seriously started thinking about that, but then she gave a deep breath. She could tell her blood was rushing to her head. Even if she was going to attempt to hack in, she would certainly fail in that mental state. She decided to take a break and rest her head before trying again.

Mikoto switched the PDA over to the 1seg television.

Most of what was airing was news about the war. A lot of normal programming had been interrupted. Some variety programs were airing, but there was something awkward about them. They were avoiding the use of words that were related to war or would remind people of war.

Nothing showing would help her rest.

Mikoto started thinking it would be better to switch over to the browser and watch an internet show, but then her index finger operating the touchscreen froze.

The announcer on the news program was explaining the situation in the snowy Russia. There was no text saying it was a live broadcast, so the footage must have been taken a bit ago.

Someone could just barely be seen at the edge of the screen.

Who was that spiky haired boy who had a Gekota strap hanging out of his pants pocket?

Chapter 3: The Stand-Off Against the Wall of Doubt. *Great_Complex.*

Part 1

The foreign unit of mercenaries known as privateers began their invasion.

Hamazura Shiage and the others could do nothing about it.

As expected, the privateers showed no sign of worrying about the injured Russian soldier. They were putting everything into the invasion.

“This way.”

Digurv led them into the basement of the clinic. It seemed the space was originally used for storing cheeses and smoked meats. Of course, it did not have the durability one would expect of a shelter. It could not defend against attacks, so it’s only purpose was to keep the enemy from finding them.

The frostbitten Russian soldier seemed able to move a bit after having warmed up next to the electric heater. They gave him some preserved cheese to help him recover his strength, but his expression looked like sorrow itself. He seemed more bothered by having been abandoned by the army than by his physical condition.

Hamazura embraced Takitsubo’s limp form.

He had never expected things to turn out that way. He had thought the back alleys of Academy City were bad, but they were not the only hell. In each place, a different mouth of darkness opened to swallow them whole. Hamazura and

Takitsubo had thought they were desperately running from the darkness, but it turned out “somewhere other than here” was not necessarily a paradise.

Low vibrations resounded from the ceiling.

They didn’t sound like explosions. It was similar to a car engine, but the vibrations were too loud.

“What is that? Treads?”

“They may have come in tanks,” responded Digurv. “There aren’t many. Two I’d guess. They don’t care about the theories followed by a normal army. They probably haven’t brought any infantry with them. …But tanks on their own are more than enough of a threat.”

As the low vibrations brought him fear, Hamazura also had a question.

“We know we don’t have any, but for all they know, we could have people hiding in or behind buildings with anti-tank rockets, right? Wouldn’t they normally destroy the main pieces of cover from a distance before charging in?”

“They aren’t a normal army. They only want to rampage around and they were just given the latest equipment, so normal military theory means nothing to them. It may leave some openings, but they are more brutal than some more mechanical soldiers. It’s best if we aren’t found.”

A terrible splintering sound could be heard from overhead.

The two of them stopped talking.

The sounds of a building being demolished continued. Instead of blowing it away with a shell, they were using the thickly armored vehicle itself to plow into the building. It certainly did not seem like the proper way of doing things.

(…They’re playing around.)

Hamazura gritted his teeth while embracing Takitsubo.

(They’re waiting for us to not be able to withstand the fear and come running out. That way they can carefully aim and shoot us while we’re in a panic.)

The privateers enjoyed the act of killing more than achieving the objective of their mission. Tearfully surrendering would be of no use. There would be no point in begging them to let Takitsubo live. They would just shoot both of them in the forehead.

Intense anger boiled up from the bottom of his gut, but there was nothing he could do. Jumping out before the privateers would just be playing into their hands.

Digurv must have been feeling even more anger than Hamazura.

It was Digurv and the others who had so much riding on that land. Seeing it all mercilessly destroyed half for fun must have doubled his anger.

Digurv managed to endure it both so he personally would survive and so Hamazura and the others hiding there would not get wrapped up in it all.

Hamazura knew for sure he shouldn't take any careless actions.

But the danger did not leave after only that.

The ceiling suddenly collapsed and the armored vehicle fell down like an avalanche.

Most likely, the privateers hadn't meant to do that. They had run through the clinic without realizing it had a basement and had fallen through the floor.

However, that was not something Hamazura and the others could endure.

A large number of wooden boards came tumbling down and Hamazura and Digurv desperately rolled out of the way. The sharp edges of the broken boards pierced into the plaster wall. The armored vehicle had a gun turret on the top. The turret did not move. The sudden fall down into the basement had bent the end of the gun.

"Run!!" Digurv yelled.

A metal door on the front of the vehicle started to open.

Hamazura dragged Takitsubo along. He handed her to Digurv who had made it

up to the surface.

That was when the door on the vehicle fully opened.

Hamazura managed to climb out along with the frostbitten Russian soldier at almost the exact moment rifle bullets began spraying around at random. The clinic was pretty much gone. Its roof and walls were missing. It was nothing more than a pile of rubble.

They had managed to avoid getting shot by the rifle bullets by getting to the surface.

However, they did not have time to relax.

Digurv spoke with a pale face.

“If we stay up here, we’ll be killed. The other privateers in the area might find us and it’s all over once the ones from the armored vehicle climb out. We need to find some other shelter before they catch up to us!!”

Something nearby exploded. Hamazura and Digurv were knocked in different directions. There was something wrong with Hamazura’s eardrums.

From his position on the ground, Hamazura could see Digurv. It seemed the man had taken less damage than him. Digurv was holding Takitsubo and he looked over at Hamazura for an instant, but he was then forced to run off somewhere. He was likely fleeing towards some other basement.

(…Fuck. I don’t know where that basement is!! He damn well better not let Takitsubo die!!)

Hamazura slowly stood up. He was almost completely in a state of panic. The frostbitten soldier must have gone somewhere, because he didn’t see him anywhere. He smelled smoke. The smells of food, cigarettes, and other signs of human life were gone. They had been completely blown away.

He knelt down behind some rubble and looked around the area.

Already, almost half of the log houses had collapsed and he could clearly see the tracks of treads in the white snow. They did not seem to belong to the armored

vehicle from before.

(A weapon. Is there any kind of weapon I can get…?)

He couldn’t overcome that crisis with just the handgun in his pocket.

For better or for worse, there was a machine gun emplacement only 10 meters away. A rather large machine gun was placed in a half circle of sandbags. Surely it was not there to shoot down an attack helicopter. It was possible it was there to merely look like it could do so in an attempt to prevent any from passing by overhead.

Of course, Hamazura did not know how to operate a machine gun.

He would just end shooting wildly unable to deal with the recoil.

But it was better than nothing.

Hamazura was so nervous that he was afraid his raised heart rate would tear his heart apart as he dashed out from behind the rubble and onto the white snow. He was almost falling more than he was running, but he managed to make it to the gun emplacement surrounded by sandbags. It had only been 10 meters, but it had seemed a path through hell to Hamazura.

The machine gun was fixed in place on 3 legs. The joints were made to rotate and the ends of the legs were completely fixed in a square piece of concrete with stakes. It couldn’t be taken out without some tools.

“Fuck!!” Hamazura swore as he pulled out his handgun.

He could still hear explosions in the area, so he guessed that a few gunshots would go unnoticed.

Just as he thought that, an armored vehicle with treads came out from behind a different building. It was about 20 meters away. It had a rotating gun turret with barrels lined up in parallel on both sides. It also had a plate-like antenna. It may have been more of an anti-aircraft gun than a tank. It had those large machine guns instead of something to shoot explosives like a tank. They really weren’t doing things the normal way. That vehicle was not meant to be on the front lines chasing enemies on the surface.

But a flesh-and-blood human would still be turned to mincemeat if they were hit by those guns.

Hamazura was so shocked he thought he was going to bite his tongue, but it seemed they hadn’t noticed him.

They were after another target.

It was a woman in her 30s who was desperately running away while holding a young baby in her arms. A girl of about 10 was running just a bit behind her. The woman holding the baby’s expression was twisted in fear, exhaustion, and humiliation. Hamazura couldn’t tell who she was, but he managed to pull some information from the back of his mind. She was most likely one of the people who had come to the village after having been rescued from the trucks. Her clothes were subtly different from Digurv and the others’.

The anti-aircraft gun adjusted slightly to aim at their backs.

If even one shot hit them, they would be damaged so badly it would be hard to know how to bury them.

Hamazura’s arms jumped up.

The next thing he knew, he was holding the machine gun set in the emplacement.

He didn’t have time to aim carefully.

He pulled the trigger.

The thing was supposed to be set in the ground, but a shock still ran through his right shoulder as if it had been hit by some kind of power tool. The immense shock blurred his vision. Even so, Hamazura gritted his teeth and continued to pull the trigger.

Sparks flew from the anti-aircraft gun’s armor.

Assuming one managed to hit it, the large machine gun did have the destructive power needed to damage a small aircraft.

The force of his barrage must have altered the rotation angle of the gun turret by

just a little bit.

When the large guns started firing, the bullets flew by the woman and the girl instead of hitting them in the back.

“Run!!” Hamazura yelled over the gunfire despite the fact that they likely didn’t understand Japanese.

The anti-aircraft gun did not leave it at that.

Using a large motor, the gun turret rotated. They seemed pissed that he had ruined their fun. The barrels looked like a golf ball could easily fit inside and they were now pointed toward the gun emplacement Hamazura was in.

“Oh, shit!”

Hamazura immediately let go of the machine gun and hid.

The spray of bullets began immediately afterwards.

The sandbags burst one after another and the soil packed inside was blown away. The large machine gun was torn to pieces. At that rate, he was going to lose his wall in a few dozen seconds. But leaving the wall in the middle of that storm of bullets could very well make his body explode.

Hamazura was unable to move, but the anti-aircraft gun ceased firing.

(Did it jam…?)

Hamazura thoughts moved in a positive direction, but that wasn’t it.

Those privateers did not follow proper military theory like normal soldiers did.

They were doing this for fun.

They put aside the guns and fired a surface-to-air missile instead.

With a trail of white smoke, the explosive flew toward the half-destroyed gun emplacement.

“God dammit!!”

Hamazura frantically jumped to the side away from the gun emplacement he had been using as a shield.

An explosion occurred immediately afterwards.

His sense of hearing was blown away.

His body floated in the air from the intense blast. After landing on the snow, he looked around the area. He just so happened to be behind a building. He was pretty sure he was 10 meters away from the gun emplacement. That was not due to his own ability. That was just how great the blast had been.

His legs trembled in fear.

There was something wrong with those privateers.

Hamazura had lived a life in the back alleys of Academy City that most would not praise him for, yet the privateers' aberrant morals were enough to scare even him. There was something wrong with someone who crossed national borders to get to a battlefield just to satisfy their desire to kill.

As Hamazura realized this bit by bit, he was unable to move.

He then heard a noise.

"!?"

He just about to panic and pull the trigger of his handgun without thinking of the consequences, but he realized who it was before he did.

It was Digurv holding Takitsubo. He must have gotten there through a different route of hiding behind rubble. Digurv had not abandoned the unconscious girl.

Hamazura's spirit had been about to break, but seeing Takitsubo's sleeping face just barely managed to support him.

"Are you okay? We could really do without any more sick or injured."

"Hey, I thought you had run off to another shelter?"

"I was running around trying to stay out of sight of the privateers and this is

where I ended up.”

That must mean the privateers had them surrounded and were tightening the circle. Hamazura’s mouth felt incredibly dry due to his tension. He was about ready to put a handful of snow into his mouth, but he had another question.

“What about some other shelter?”

“The entrance to the other one is nearby, but the privateers are wandering around near it. They don’t seem to have found it yet, but they may figure out there’s one there if I get close.”

“Shit,” Hamazura muttered.

The noise of engines was surprisingly quiet. The anti-aircraft gun from before was probably the only thing running. The armored vehicle had fallen through the floor of the clinic and couldn’t be used anymore. The few privateers that had come from it just so happened to be blocking their way to the other shelter.

“What were they doing?”

“They were checking everything including the attic and the curtains. They’re even looking under children’s beds in an attempt to find any stash of money or valuables. They also seemed mad that they couldn’t find their targets. They’re all just itching to kill their enemy.”

“…So they don’t intend to let us get away. And they don’t seem like the type that would respond to an appeal to their compassion.”

The privateers ended up sealing up the entrance to the shelter.

There was no longer a safe place they could run to.

It was possible no such place had existed in the first place.

Hamazura looked down at Takitsubo’s unconscious face. Her forehead was damp with a sickly sweat and her bangs were sticking there. When he kindly fixed her hair, he realized that his fingertips had stopped trembling.

He could not let her die there.

He did not want to let people who had worried for her die either.

He didn't want to be defeated without being able to do anything. He'd had enough of that in the back alleys of Academy City.

Hadn't Hamazura Shiage decided to escape all that?

He was angry at the unreasonable violence. Why did Takitsubo's life have to be targeted? Why did the people who had worried for her despite not knowing her have to be attacked for such a ridiculous reason? It was time to fight back. If it was a battle where both sides' lives were on the line, Hamazura had the right to bite back.

"…Can you hold on to Takitsubo for just a little longer?"

"Wh-what are you going to do?"

Digurv may have noticed the change in Hamazura's expression and general atmosphere.

Hamazura looked back at Takitsubo's face once more as Digurv held her.

"I've had enough of their shit. I'm gonna blow that thing to pieces."

"Just so you know, we don't have any RPGs. That thing may have thinner armor than a tank, but an AK isn't enough to get through!!"

"They're like point stickers, right?"

Digurv looked confused at Hamazura's odd remark and Hamazura repeated himself in a more understandable way.

"You said you had collected all the landmines you've dug up in one place so you can hand them over to an NGO, right?"

Part 2

He rushed from the base.

Accelerator ran across the snow.

He was not chasing anything and he was not sprinting towards a specific location.

He was running away.

Academy City's #1 Level 5 was running away while holding Last Order.

He honestly found her terrifying.

More so than Kihara Amata.

More so than Kakine Teitoku.

More so than Aiwass.

More so than that boy.

The enemy chasing after Accelerator was overwhelmingly terrifying because she threatened to destroy the pillar supporting his values.

He heard the sound of electricity sparking from behind him.

It was on a smaller scale than a Railgun from #3.

However, it was on a decidedly greater scale than the standard Sister.

He heard what sounded like a popping balloon.

It was the sound of an iron nail about 2 cm long being fired at just over the speed of sound.

Its power was on the level of a handgun bullet.

The iron nail had been fired from behind Accelerator and it accurately pierced into his left arm halfway between the elbow and shoulder.

It wasn’t that he hadn’t been able to reflect it.

He hadn’t been sure if he *should* reflect it.

No, what he couldn’t decide was if it was okay to kill the attacker by reflecting it.

He may have been able to alter the angle so it only injured her, but he could not deny the fact that he might end up reflecting it and killing her due to a mistake or slipping back into old habits. When he thought about that possibility, he could not act.

Strength left his arm.

The small girl it was supposed to be supporting flew through the air.

The warmth of the girl who was supporting Accelerator’s mentality was swept away by the freezing cold that seemed to split through the snowy plain.

“Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

His scream reverberated throughout the area.

Last Order’s body landed in the deep snow.

Accelerator could not even reach his arm out towards her. He lost his balance and disturbed the white snow as he almost completely collapsed.

He almost felt like laughter was going to overflow from the bottom of his gut.

Accelerator had a rule he had imposed on himself.

In the past he had killed a large number of clones for his own experiment.

That was why he had decided that, no matter what happened, he would never again hurt the clones known as the Sisters and Last Order.

To accomplish that, Accelerator had taken part in many bloody battles. Kihara Amata, Kakine Teitoku, and Shiokishi of the board of directors. His body and mind had been worn down during his fights against various monsters. He had lost to Aiwass. That was why he had fled to that land of snow. His efforts had hardly been perfect, but he had felt that he had done an okay job of protecting the lives and lifestyles of Last Order and the Sisters. He had believed that he had done what was necessary for that.

But of all things, Academy City had put together a plan that seemed to be pinpointed to break exactly that. This plan took his desire to protect them even if it meant making an enemy of the entire world and used it as a tool for fighting against him.

(They're fucking insane…)

He needed to protect Last Order.

He needed to defeat the Sister assassin.

If he protected the one or let the other live, Accelerator would be breaking that rule he had risked his life to protect.

(The Third Season? *They created more of them* just to create this situation!? They did it just to stimulate my trauma and break my mind!? Academy City is fucking insane. Now that I can see those bastards from the outside, it's even more obvious. There is something fundamentally fucked up about that city!!)

He could not accomplish any kind of normal thought pattern.

That was proof that the attacker's mere existence had shaken Accelerator's mentality.

It may have been true that a mental strategy would be more effective against someone who had the power to reflect a nuclear attack.

"Oh, dear. Do you think you're protecting Misaka? No one asked you to do that. In fact, it's rather arrogant of you to think that's enough to make up for killing over 10,000 people."

Those words stabbed into him.

The tone of her voice was the same, but the feelings packed into them were overwhelmingly different.

“You should just bring yourself to ruin already. If you just break your rule and fight all out, surely you could kill Misaka,” said the voice coming from behind the mask with the lenses arranged like the face of an analog clock.

There was no fear in the voice.

She may have been sure that he absolutely could not attack back.

She was about 10 meters away.

“It looks like Misaka’s countermeasure for your electrode may have been unnecessary.”

Electricity sparked from the bangs visible at the edge of the mask. She may have been attempting to jam the signal with her electrical powers. Or perhaps she was directly interfering with the Misaka Network.

After thinking that far, a question floated up in Accelerator’s chest.

Last Order was a special clone that held control over all the orders to the Sisters connected to the Misaka Network. If that attacker was one of them, Last Order should be able to seal her movements with a single order.

The higher ups had to know that Accelerator had brought Last Order with him.

Would they still send a Sister who could have her control stolen at any time as an assassin?

That meant…

(It’s a disguise!!)

Accelerator stopped running once he came to that conclusion.

The snow was blown away and the earth below shattered and flew towards the attacker with overwhelming speed. It was like a shotgun fired using natural

objects.

In response, the attacker merely lay down.

However, it was a smooth motion of just lowering her hips.

She easily evaded the uppercut-like strike that had mainly been aimed at her face and upper body. However, the fragments of earth caught on her mask and blew it away into the air.

Her face was now exposed.

This time Accelerator fell down on top of the white snow.

He had not been hit by some strange attack. He just felt an intense resistance to accepting the face below that mask.

“It’s no use,” said the attacker without even a smile on the face that would be the one Last Order could have when she became the same age as high schoolers. “You use the Misakas’ network for your calculations. Misaka is part of the Third Season, so she can monitor the activities of the Misaka Network and read what your next attack will be. It’ll take quite something to fatally wound this Misaka. Do you really have room to hold back? If you’re gonna do this, you need to be intent on killing Misaka. C’mon, if you understand, come kill her. Of course, you can’t do that. If you did, all your work up to now would have been for naught. Then could you shut up and let Misaka kick your ass? Gya ha ha ha!!”

She was a fake.

She was using special makeup.

She was using some kind of esper power.

Accelerator stood up thinking those things, but…

“Help me. Misaka is scared.”

“…!!”

Hearing the girl’s tone of voice, the monster froze.

As blood dripped from his left arm where the iron nail had pierced it, Accelerator could not even swing up his fist for self defense.

“By the way…”

The attacker brought her hand up to her neck.

He saw a thin scar there that would be easy to overlook if he were not paying attention.

“Misaka has sheets and selectors installed in her. Even if Last Order sends a signal to stop Misaka, it’s set up to automatically reject the signal as long as an approval code is not sent from the board of directors. You can’t stop Misaka even if you pathetically rely on that little girl.”

“…”

The answer thrust before him was quite simple.

It was kill or be killed.

However, that did not apply only to Accelerator.

If it did, he would just give up and let her finish him off.

The problem was the fact that Last Order was wrapped up in the assassination.

It was not the same as destroying some lowly thug.

Nor was it a situation where giving up his own life would solve everything.

Neither way would save them.

Accelerator was prepared to point a gun at his own head if it meant keeping another Sister from dying. He could not kill them. Even if it meant making an enemy of the entire world and even if it meant he would have to fight countless monsters from the bloody darkness of the world, he would never, ever bring pain or fear to the girls who held that face. He didn’t think that his bloody self would make them smile, but he wanted to at least protect the smiles they had for themselves.

And yet both winning and losing would create a dilemma for a Sister in his current situation.

Having gone through that experiment, Accelerator knew that Academy City was 100% serious if they said they would kill the Sisters. He knew they would not hold back and fail to go through with it or anything like that.

But…

This was…

Accelerator knew that he would likely completely lose it if either of the Sisters died.

"…The Third Season," Accelerator muttered. "If they've started that and created you, then replacements can be made for the other Sisters at any time. I'm sure they've made that decision both from a cost and ethics standpoint."

"They have. And the command tower of Last Order is no exception."

Academy City was carrying out some kind of experiment. He knew that Aiwass was involved in that plan and that the Sisters and their network were being used for it.

"But the board of directors wants to maintain control of the Misaka Network at all times, so I'm guessing the major decision to redo the Network wasn't made until Last Order went missing. Everything would've been fine if you hadn't needlessly taken her away and now it's come back to bite you in the ass."

Basically, that meant she was there to kill Last Order not to retrieve her.

If they were remaking the Misaka Network and its command tower, the old numbers were no longer needed. In fact, having two command towers might actually harm the network. That was why Academy City was taking the initiative and having Last Order killed.

Yet she had done nothing wrong.

It was all for an unnecessary reason that was just for someone else's convenience.

“What’re you gonna do?” the attacker smiled.

It was a wicked and emotional smile that did not match his impression of the Sisters.

“If you don’t want to kill any Sisters, you have no choice but to let Misaka do you in here. But Misaka will attack Last Order once she’s killed you. Even if you stop her by force, Misaka will still die. Gya ha ha ha ha!! Either way, your mind is done for. Misaka’ll make sure to play with you until your personality is completely shattered, so let’s have some fun!!”

Those words of despair marked the beginning of the battle to utterly destroy the pillar supporting Accelerator’s heart that he had worked so hard to build up.

Part 3

A Russian navy submarine had circumvented the intense battlefield of the Sea of Japan by heading through the Pacific Ocean. It was currently near Indonesia.

It was not making preparations to fire ballistic missiles at Academy City from an unexpected place.

Russia was already firing missiles from all sorts of angles, but they were all being accurately shot down. Most were being intercepted outside the atmosphere, but some were being blown away by a mysterious beam 5 seconds after launching.

Given the known history of missile development, it was a completely impossible feat.

The interception systems humanity had put together were a concentration of

many different technologies, but they still did not have perfect accuracy. The fundamental theory for dealing with ballistic missiles was to take political action to prevent them from being fired in the first place.

The submarine was near Indonesia to carry out the countermeasure the higher ups had come up with. The submarine's goal was to cut off their supply line.

Academy City was part of Japan which was an island nation. Unlike Russia, its resources were scarce. The Russians hadn't thought the war would go on that long, but that meant the strategy of cutting off Academy City's overseas resources was an effective one.

They couldn't wield that seemingly all powerful technology forever.

The day they ran out of stamina would mark their death.

That was what the higher ups had thought.

To make sure that not a single transport ship made it through, over 20 submarines had been prepared.

But…

"Nothing's showing up," someone muttered as no ship appeared no longer how long they waited.

The channel they were in was like a highway with ships headed to places all over the world instead of just to Japan. They had actually seen ships heading to many different countries. But not a single transport ship headed to Japan had shown up.

Maybe they were using a different route and maybe their ships were disguised as ones heading to different countries. They thought of various possibilities, but they couldn't find the answer. All they knew was that Academy City could not continue functioning without a large number of transport ships coming and going.

A transmission came in from one of the other submarines in the fleet. Both amateurs and soldiers got bored with nothing to do. Not finding a single target was extra irritating when shut inside a submarine.

“Are they really using ships? I’ve heard they’re using some amazing aircraft back home.”

“I doubt they can bring in every sort of material including items for daily living with only those monsters. Don’t let the impact of their tech lead you astray. None of that changes the fact that sea routes are the most popular for bringing in large amounts of goods.”

“But we haven’t seen a single transport ship headed for Academy City. We’ve even carried out a few pirate-like forced inspections, but that turned up nothing. Where are they? They aren’t on the sea or in the air. They aren’t heading underneath the sea, are they?”

“Couldn’t be. Submarines can only be so big for their noise to not be detected. They can’t be used for large scale transports.”

“…What do we do? That was a pretty close guess,” said the young communications officer in an Academy City submarine.

They were slipping past one of the Russian submarines at a distance of only a few meters. Most of their cargo was supplies for Academy City. The Russians’ conversation had hit on the truth.

The only thing off was the size.

While the Russian sub was only 100 meters long the Academy City one was easily 5 times that.

Academy City was not on a coast, but a few of the organizations that worked with it had prepared that secret weapon based on the technological information Academy City supplied them with. When the sub entered Japanese waters, smaller subs would meet up with it and take the materials to the port.

The navigator sitting near the communications officer responded to the young man.

“They haven’t detected us with their radar or sonar, so officially we don’t exist.”

Normally a submarine that large would be quite noticeable by the propeller noise alone. The sound of the water being disturbed would be detected.

That didn’t happen because that submarine did not have a propeller. Instead, the surface of the sub detected the movements of the ocean currents and used water jets to propel itself so that the noise would be blend in with the currents. The noise of the sub itself was impossible to completely eliminate, but the water jets interfered with it so that enemy sonar would not detect anything unusual.

“If we used our ultrasonic weapons, we could make it look like propeller trouble instead of an attack.”

Just to be sure, the surface of the sub was made difficult to detect which even prevented the sub from being detected by magnetism.

Even so, if it rose above a certain depth, it could still be detected, but that also meant that the odds of detection approached zero when it was below that depth.

“Our orders are not to sink the enemy,” the navigator said as if confirming that with himself. “We just need to carry out our mission. The greatest victory for us is to guarantee safety.”

Part 4

The landmines were stored at the edge of the village.

As the fear-inducing sound of the anti-aircraft gun’s engine continued, Hamazura darted out from behind the rubble. He continued along the snow while hiding behind bits of cover that were just barely maintaining their form as buildings.

He was heading for a small hut.

The wooden building was so small a minivan would not even fit inside of it.

He opened the simple door that was reminiscent of the door to a bathroom stall and saw objects carelessly piled up as if they were magazines. They were pentagonal metal plates that looked a bit like a home base from baseball. In addition to those items that were tied up with string were cylinders about the size of soda cans.

“So this is it…” Hamazura said in almost a groan.

According to Digurv, the home base-like ones were anti-tank mines. Hamazura grabbed one of the tied-together bundles with both hands and placed it atop the snow. It was the kind of action one would not expect someone who knew what the mines were capable of would be able to do.

He untied the bundle and grabbed the edge of one of the home-base like objects.

There was a small triangular part sticking out at each corner of the pentagon. They were most likely the fuse that detected weight. When he flipped it over, he saw that the center was sunken in slightly and a branch a few centimeters long was stuck in horizontally. It was pressing on a pin-like object. The branch was not a part of the mine. It had been hastily installed by the villagers after digging up the mine. Digurv had said the mine worked the same as a grenade. If he pulled out the branch and put it on the ground, it would be ready to go. After that, a rhinoceros beetle climbing on it would set it off. There may have been tools for operating the pin after setting it up.

He wanted to take as many of them as possible, but the mines were heavy. He could only carry 2 or 3 at a time. If he had 4 or 5 of them, he wouldn’t be able to run properly. He was already at a serious disadvantage, so he didn’t want to add on any more handicaps.

(…I guess I’m limited to 2.)

Suddenly, the wall of a house relatively close to the hut was blown away.

It was due to the giant bullets of the anti-aircraft gun.

Digurv had said that only two vehicles had come to the village and the first armored vehicle had already fallen down into the basement shelter. If he could

just destroy that anti-aircraft gun, the threat would be gone for the time being.

Hamazura drew back from the loud sound of the barrage and then left the hut carrying the landmines.

Next, he had to get near the anti-aircraft gun.

There was also the means of setting up the landmine in a place the vehicle was likely to pass through, but Hamazura had no proof it would actually pass through any one area. As he also had a limited number of them and he couldn’t exactly head out into the open and set up the landmine, that simply didn’t seem like a good strategy.

To ensure he took it out, it would be fastest to get close to the anti-aircraft gun and throw a landmine at it. He had asked Digurv to be sure, and they could indeed be used like grenades.

Nevertheless…

(Getting close enough to it is a damn high hurdle to get over.)

After all, his opponent had high caliber machine guns that could blow away buildings as well as people. If they noticed him, it was over and he was going to be charging right in making it easier for them to notice him.

He didn’t really think it sounded like the best idea he had ever had.

But succeeding in that plan was the only way to save everyone in the village.

If he failed, even Takitsubo would be killed.

What was the point of having escaped Academy City if that happened? He wouldn't be able to bring her back to life even if he found something to negotiate with.

(I have to do it!!)

Hamazura ran along the side of the crumbled rubble. The anti-aircraft gun was searching for a target while crushing buildings for fun. The place the villagers were hiding in might be discovered before long. Hamazura ran along an area

where the collapsing roof and walls were just barely staying up.

The sound and vibration from the treads squeezed at his heart.

The mass of steel passed by on the other side of a broken window.

Hamazura glanced outside the window while pressing his back up against the wall that seemed like it was about to collapse.

It was close.

It was about 5 meters away.

He reached for the small branch on the back of the anti-tank mine.

If he pulled it out, the mine's functionality would return. Even a slight shock would set it off. It would definitely go off if he threw it.

He took one deep breath.

And then stopped.

He pulled out the branch on the back of the mine and removed his back from the wall. He leaned out the broken window.

The anti-aircraft gun seemed to have noticed him.

But between the time it would take for the large gun turret to rotate and the time it would take for a human arm to swing, Hamazura had the clear advantage.

He threw the explosive and hid behind the wall.

The mine struck the side of the gun turret and then detonated.

A loud roar shook Hamazura's brain.

A landmine was different from a hand grenade. Mines were bombs that were meant to be placed on the ground. They could be made so the energy from the limited amount of explosive was focused up rather than in every direction.

The anti-tank mine Hamazura had thrown was made in that way.

As the mine had spun through the air, it had hit the gun turret with its bottom side. The shock had set the explosive off, but the blast had gone in the wrong direction.

The anti-aircraft gun was not blown away.

Hamazura saw the turret rotating towards him.

That was when he heard another odd noise.

It was the sound of a building wall collapsing due to the blast that had gone in the wrong direction. It was the wall of a small church across from the house Hamazura was hiding in. It was the village's only stone building and it had been on the verge of collapse even before the blast. The steeple with a bell inside crumbled and fell in the direction of the anti-aircraft gun.

The privateers inside had noticed it.

However, the steeple swung down like a hammer before they could get away. The vehicle was a mass of thick steel, so that was not enough to destroy it, but the great weight was enough to completely seal its movements. The gun turret with the machine guns on it could not rotate either.

"…"

Hamazura remained silent for a bit.

The various emotions that had been boiling up in his chest did not come out.

He pulled his head inside the window and looked around at the destroyed house. It wasn't just a set. People lived in that room.

He grabbed a bottle of vodka that was still intact from some shelves that had fallen over.

He left the building and stood before the anti-aircraft gun.

A proper tank would have light machine guns installed on it to take care of approaching infantry, but that anti-aircraft gun was not intended to be brought into enemy lines, so it did not have anything of the sort.

It could no longer hurt Hamazura.

He brought his mouth close to the small ventilation opening for bringing oxygen into the thickly armored vehicle.

"…It sure is cold today."

He was speaking in Japanese, but he didn't particularly care.

It wasn't his job to have them understand him.

"It's nice weather for cooking some meat."

When he struck the roof of the vehicle with the bottle of vodka, one of the privateers frantically popped out of the metal hatch.

Hamazura aimed his small handgun towards the hatch.

There was no hesitation in his aim.

Part 5

Kamijou Touma ran about the half-destroyed plaza.

The result of the encounter had been terrible.

Three professional magicians, Lessar, Elizalina, and Vento of the Front, had been defeated, Sasha Kreutzev had been taken away by Fiamma, and only the scars of the battle remained.

Currently, Kamijou was treating the injured magicians. However, he did not have the proper knowledge to do so. He was mainly following their instructions.

“Vento…”

“If you’re trying to thank me, there’s no need,” she said with her tongue sticking out despite the fact that she could barely move otherwise. “I didn’t like Fiamma’s way of doing things. That’s all. I couldn’t allow him to have free reign over the Roman Catholic Church any longer. My actions just so happened to be to your advantage.”

“…”

Her voice was filled with hate, but Kamijou felt somehow relieved.

Not everyone in the Roman Catholic Church agreed with Fiamma. There were people in that organization who would object to his methods. Learning that anew relieved his burden much more than he had expected.

Elizalina spoke while lying on the ground unmoving.

“I did not expect for Fiamma to be able to use the knowledge from the 103,000 grimoires.”

“Index does not completely cover spells for God’s Right seat. I’m betting Fiamma is using her to fill in some gaps to raise efficiency.”

“Do you know where Fiamma of the Right went?”

It would probably be best to take Elizalina away on an ambulance, but she refused to. She may have been feeling guilty since the people had been exposed to magic during the fight against Fiamma. She may have wanted to avoid leaving the scene at such a difficult time. Only Elizalina herself knew for sure.

“...He probably headed for a certain base across the border,” Kamijou responded to Elizalina’s question after thinking for a bit. “He was already making some preparations there and he went as far as evicting the people living in the area. My guess is that he’s taking Sasha there to do something.”

It still was not clear what it was that Fiamma intended to do.

However, the preliminary preparations had already caused so much damage and it was possible that World War III itself could be considered part of his

preparations. It was possible what Fiamma was going to do from then on would cause damage on an even greater scale. Whatever it was, they could not sit idly by and let him do it.

“I’ll do something,” Kamijou said to Elizalina after thinking a bit more. “I’ll do something about him. I need to save Index. You all stay here. Whatever it is Fiamma is doing could very well end up reaching this place again.”

Just when Kamijou was about to head out, someone grabbed his arm.

It was Lessar whose injuries had been relatively light compared to the other two. She didn’t say anything, but Kamijou could tell she wasn’t going to let go of his arm if he didn’t let her come with him.

Kamijou hesitated for an instant, but finally nodded.

Lessar let go and stood next to Kamijou.

“We don’t have time. We need to get some help from the Elizalina Alliance. We can borrow a car to get us close to the base.”

“They’re enemy nations. Wouldn’t that put us at even more risk?”

“The Elizalina Alliance is a collection of countries that split off from Russia in recent years. They use almost the exact same type of cars as Russia, so we should be fine as long as we can get through an area of the border with light security.”

“…”

Kamijou hesitated.

“…Is it really okay to get them involved in this?”

“?”

“As I said before, they’re enemy nations. Getting help is fine, but if Russia finds out, they could be killed. Is it really okay to ask for help in this situation?”

“That isn’t for us to decide,” Lessar unhesitatingly said.

At first, it may have seemed like she was just saying that, but she was just that accustomed to life or death situations.

“The ones whose lives are on the line should decide that. At the very least, they should decide what they do with their own lives. If they refuse, we can just find some other way.”

“…”

But Kamijou remained silent once more.

Lessar then put her index finger to her temple and spoke in an annoyed fashion.

“In the end, I think it’s the same.”

“What is?”

“Whatever Fiamma says, people should choose how to live their own lives.”

“…Maybe.”

“And even if you have been hiding something, you haven’t been frozen in that state. You have still continued to move forward, right? And as a result, you have saved quite a few people and even stopped the coup d’etat in the UK. Honestly, I think that’s a life you should be proud of.”

Perhaps it had not been wrong to hide the fact that he had lost his memories.

Perhaps it had not merely been selfish of him to do so to protect Index’s smile.

That was true.

Kamijou had resolved plenty of incidents and saved plenty of people’s lives. Most likely, those were admirable things. There were quite a few people he had met after losing his memories. To those people, it did not matter if he had those older memories or not. The lack of those memories did not change the fact that he had fought for them.

But…

“Even so,” muttered Kamijou as every word seemed to stab into his own chest.

“Even so, I’m not sure it’s up to me to decide whether the actions I’ve taken were really for Index’s sake.”

Part 6

The ocean surface in the Strait of Dover had been solidified and British and French magicians clashed atop it. The battle was almost a free for all, but the British forces were starting to rally together around the knights who were borrowing the power of Curtana Original via the mobile fortress Glastonbury.

However, humans tended to push back harder when others pushed against them.

The French magicians were not about to simply fall back upon seeing the values and conditions. The harder they were pushed against, the more ghastly an expression they held as they used various attack spells.

A few of the British knights fell back a bit.

It was a just a tiny bit and they were doing it to reevaluate the distance between them.

Second Princess Carissa interpreted it as weakness and casually took a step forward from the front line.

“Oh, no. At this rate, those French bastards are going to capture me and then gang rape me to death.”

“…!!!???”

With that, the British knights could not give up.

It felt like their bodies were at the limit as they swung their swords, but they just

barely managed to keep Carissa from being swallowed up by the mass of French forces.

Carissa put her hands on her hips.

“Really, you shouldn’t hold back on the battlefield. You should have been fighting that hard from the beginning.”

At that point, Knight Leader finally used a communications spiritual item to contact Windsor Castle.

“That’s right. Connect me to Queen Elizard! Hurry!! I need to get permission to spank Lady Carissa!!”

“Hey, stop that!! Knowing mother, she’s likely to focus all of Curtana Second’s power on you solely for that purpose!!”

As they yelled at each other while fighting over the communications spiritual item, the larger battle continued. As many swords and spells crossed, Carissa glanced at the French magicians and spoke.

“Hmph. They have no individuality,” she practically spat out. “There are plenty of people with legitimate strength, but they’re lacking any kind of deciding blow. Are they trying to say that modern military force is solely in organizations? They can’t stand up to us with our Saint and our knights.”

An explosive noise rang out.

It came from above Carissa’s head.

A bolt of lightning shot down from the sky directly for the second princess.

However, she remained unscathed.

The knights around her must have had a means prepared because they all swung their swords above her head and blew the lightning away.

“In the end, the Holy Woman of Versailles can only work from a distance,” Carissa said sounding rather uninterested. “It’s clear that you fundamentally cannot leave the palace. It isn’t that there is a seal on the palace preventing you

from leaving. Instead, your body cannot live without the magical environment inside the palace. You have just been readjusted to that extent down to the internal organ level by the foolish leaders of France that are afraid of you."

Her words were most likely reaching the ears of the Holy Woman of Versailles in her distant palace.

No response came.

Carissa continued regardless.

"And you cannot finish someone off so easily with spells that give you the needed range."

Assume a magician has a power of 100.

If the magician used all of his power for attack, his attack power would be 100. However, spells that extended the magician's range also lowered his attack power proportionally.

There existed spells that could apply damage to any spot in the universe completely ignoring the physical distance, but the Holy Woman of Versailles's spells did not have that characteristic. She only had the stereotypical spells that lost power the farther away they were used.

And on top of that, the knights gaining power from Curtana Second had superhuman abilities. They were not a force that could be dealt with using weakened magic.

"Now then," Carissa said to the Holy Woman of Versailles who was most likely viewing the battle from afar. "I think it's time to get serious. You can just sit there helplessly watching us land."

Part 7

The sound of crackling electricity exploded across the snow.

The Third Season.

That project had been carried out to kill Accelerator who could no longer be controlled and Last Order and the other Sisters that could no longer be used due to the effects of Aiwass.

It was a series different from the 20,000 +α set of Sisters.

And then the attacker gave her name.

“Misaka supposes you could refer to her as Misaka Worst.”

She likely knew that she was a being that should not have been born and no one especially wanted.

She played with the 2 cm steel nails in her hand.

At times, a nail would be fired at over the speed of sound along with the sound of a bursting balloon.

But…

(From the amount of electricity she’s using, that isn’t a practical railgun.)

As the situation had him cornered, Accelerator forced his head out of its chaos to analyze the situation.

(The same method is used in the magnetic sniper rifles some snipers use. Instead of Fleming’s left-hand rule, it more simply uses an electromagnet to fire a steel bullet.)

Accelerator was still not using his reflection.

Instead, he was altering the vectors of his leg strength to take quick bursts of speed and escape Misaka Worst’s aim.

The situation as a whole and his need to protect Last Order meant he could not avoid the fight altogether.

But he wanted to avoid finishing off Misaka Worst if possible. Even if she had been created in a plan other than the one that had created the 20,000 +α set of Sisters, even if she was a part of the Third Season that had been activated to kill Accelerator and the others, he still utterly opposed the idea of letting a clone of the same series die.

It was rather cruel, but Accelerator thought about what he would do if it were Kihara Amata or Kakine Teitoku that stood before them. If it were those fuckers, he would not hesitate. He would rip them to shreds in order to protect Last Order. Accelerator was not a philanthropist. If it brought him towards his goal, he did not mind killing his enemy. However, that was why he couldn't let himself carry out that set of rules when it came to the "enemy" before him there.

Of course, Misaka Worst had realized that.

She knew Accelerator was hesitating and she was using that in her strategy.

After all, that was what she had been born to do.

"You should be careful," she said with an expression on her face that was clearly different from what one would see on the Sisters' faces.

It was a grin filled with spite.

"I don't have the output of the Original, but Misaka can still manage 200,000,000 volts. That's around Level 4."

An explosive noise rang out and Misaka Worst's body disappeared.

She had used an extremely high voltage current to detonate the air and had used the momentum to fly up into the air. It was the same method she had used to land safely from the transport plane.

Accelerator realized it too late.

"One more shot," said a voice directly above him.

And then a 2 cm nail flew down towards him.

Accelerator jumped to the side, but he lost his balance partway through and fell

down on the snow.

There was a dark red wound on his calf.

That time, the nail remained in his body.

“Run from Misaka more,” said Misaka Worst as she landed back on the snow.

She scraped the steel nails together in her hand.

She was purposefully making that painful noise in order to torment her target just a little more.

“You killed more than 10,000 Misakas, right?”

Her words stabbed into him.

Her words held a completely different meaning from the words of some complete stranger.

Accelerator could reflect a nuclear attack, but the slight vibration of the air that was her voice destroyed him from the inside.

“So run. Pathetically beg for your life. You aren’t a normal person who gets a normal death. You won’t have made up for what you’ve done unless you at least have your human rights trampled on 10,000 times. Just so you know, that’s the bare minimum. If you add in the interest, three times that won’t be enough.”

The skin of Misaka Worst’s face was twisted from within.

The delicate features of that feminine face became distorted like a plastic doll in a fire.

It was caused by hatred.

It was not just simple anger. Such an extreme smile spread across her face that it looked like the frames of her face would never return to normal.

(…Don’t be led astray.)

Accelerator suppressed the pain spreading from his arm and leg and desperately

thought.

(She isn’t one of them. She isn’t one of the ones created directly for the experiment. She’s just a fake who is literally borrowing their face and body. I don’t need to pay attention to every little thing she says.)

An unknown feeling gathered in the center of his forehead.

Should he bring his reflection across his entire body?

Should he reflect Misaka Worst’s voice?

He was weighing his options.

But…

“Misaka is the same.”

It was just one sentence, but those 6 syllables were enough to keep Accelerator from making his decision.

“Misaka was created in order to kill you. Misaka didn’t particularly want to be born, but she was forced to do so. In order to cut off the signals from Last Order, her skin was cut open and a bunch of strange sheets and selectors were embedded within. If it weren’t for you, none of that would have happened. If you hadn’t made that decision, Misaka would never have been born. And even if she had been, it would not have been in that way that cut off all chance for a future. ‘It hurts. Help.’ By the time Misaka learned those words, she was already in a situation where she could not say them. That is why Misaka has the right to blame you. That is why she has a reason to kill you.”

She spoke each word like a twisted killer showing off her murder weapons.

“While all the Misakas are individuals, they are also one large Misaka connected by the network. This is not a thought pattern unique to this Misaka. It is a portion of the large Misaka over the network.”

Accelerator heard a dull noise and his vision blurred.

It took a bit of time for him to realize that Misaka Worst had detonated the air for

quick movement and kicked him in the face.

“Why do you think none of the other Misakas including Last Order ever blamed you? Didn’t you find it to be odd? You killed them and killed them until you had killed more than 10,000 of them yet they don’t seem to hold any hatred towards you. The reason for that is quite simple. It is not because the Misakas are noble and perfect or because they are pure and proper princesses. …Nor is it because they did not feel any resentment toward you. They merely could not show it on the surface because their means of processing human-like emotions are incomplete. They are unable to comprehend or express their emotions.”

That was her aim.

She was trying to corner Accelerator.

Therefore, he didn’t have to pay attention to what she said.

It was all a calculated ploy, so he didn’t have to take it seriously.

But…

Accelerator just could not ignore the hatred coming from Misaka Worst…and possibly all of the Sisters.

Even if it was a part of her plan, it still bothered him.

What if Last Order’s smile was not there because she had forgiven him? What if her personality that had been quickly constructed by the Testament was just not mature enough to properly recognize negative emotions such as hatred or fear? Would she really forgive him so easily after what he had done? Those fears shook Accelerator.

Drops of red blood scattered across the white snow.

A line of red seemed to trail the path of Accelerator’s body.

Misaka Worst wiped the red liquid off of the tip of her shoe onto the snow.

“Gya ha ha!! The Misakas are getting more human-like bit by bit! As they do, they can do more and more human-like things!! But being more human-like is

not always a good thing! Before long, all those Misakas will become aware of their hatred. They will begin to realize they have a legitimate right to revenge!! Your atonement you've been getting so caught up in does nothing more than satisfy yourself!! It does nothing to reduce the Misakas' hatred!! At some point, all the Misakas connected to the network will be after your life based on their human-like resentment!! Will you let them succeed and give up your life or will you have them fail and kill all of the Misakas? Either way, the convenient future you've imagined will not come to pass!!"

The tips of her shoes flew towards him again and again.

Each time, blood spewed from various parts of Accelerator.

He could avoid her attacks if he tried.

He could strike back if he tried.

However, Accelerator was not even able to try.

The movements of his heart that let him try would not come forth.

Something was beginning to break within his heart.

It wasn't just due to the external damage. The anger burning in opposition to that was great enough that he thought something was going to break.

And once that something broke, there would be no fixing it.

If that something broke, he could easily transform into a monster even greater than when he was taking part in the experiment.

"If you want to soak in that sentimental delusion of yours and deny Misaka's words, that's fine. But what Misaka is saying is already being proven to you. This Misaka, Misaka Worst, has had the secretion patterns of the substances in her brain intentionally adjusted so that she can easily display the negative emotions that the other Misakas cannot. Misaka can easily read the negative emotions from the giant network. As such, she has proven that the other Misakas do have hatred and that they simply cannot express it. …And that applies to all Misakas including Last Order!!"

Misaka Worst's foot stopped just as she was about to bring it down on his face.

She was looking at something.

Last Order was collapsed on the snow a bit away. The effects of Aiwass's appearance had put the young girl in a state where she could barely maintain consciousness. As she lay on the snow, she slowly stretched out an arm in Accelerator's direction. She seemed to want to somehow protect his trampled and bloody form.

Last Order paid no heed to the realistic values such as whether she could actually reach him or not.

It seemed she was attempting to seal the attacker's movements using some sort of power, but there was no change in Misaka Worst. It seemed she had some sort of countermeasure towards that and Last Order may not have even had the strength needed to function as the command tower.

Sweat dripped from the small girl's face.

It was clear something bad was going on within her.

"…"

Misaka Worst stopped moving just slightly.

And then an even more twisted smile spread across her face.

"That's right. Misaka should take care of that defective unit first. That sounds like it would be more effective."

A very bad feeling swelled up from within the depths of the heart of Academy City's #1.

"When the Misakas are renewed under the Third Season, the redeployment and expansion of the network will bring about greater performance and faster progress."

Misaka Worst scraped together the 2 cm steel nails in her hand once more.

“Last Order, the old generation command tower, is no longer needed. In fact, her existence is nothing more than a hindrance to all the Misakas who will be deployed from now on.”

It seemed almost like a cannibalistic situation, but if the Sisters were thought of as single existence ruled by the large network, then what she said made sense using normal human thought patterns.

Humans thought of convenient things.

That isn’t the real you. There is wonderful talent hidden within you. To draw it out, you need to become the real you. Abandon the old you.

Normal humans used that type of convenient idea when it came to mental concepts. But the Sisters were a giant network made up of multiple bodies. The idea of “abandoning the old you” could be taken quite literally with them.

(…Ah.)

The desire to stop their spontaneous “progress” and have them remain exactly the same was nothing but his ego. It was much like a parent’s desire for their child to always remain a child. It was nothing more than robbing them of their freedom.

(…So that’s what it is.)

He could not resolve that situation without anyone dying.

He only had two options.

Would he kill Misaka Worst in order to protect Last Order?

Or would he just watch as Last Order was killed in order to avoid killing a Sister?

After he had been pierced by steel nails, kicked all over, and stomped on, Misaka Worst’s target had finally changed to Last Order.

Accelerator finally realized what he had to do.

He had no choice but to give up.

An explosive noise rang out.

It was the sound of Misaka Worst's body flying up into the air just as she had been about to stomp on Accelerator's face and send a steel nail towards Last Order. She flew through a large arc and finally landed over 10 meters away

That's right.

That was what happened when Academy City's #1 got serious.

Whether it was a 200,000,000 volt electric current, a nail flying at over the speed of sound, or one of the Sisters, those tiny threats couldn't do anything to him.

"Gah!?" Misaka Worst gasped before standing back up and confirming her target's location.

Accelerator had lost his central core and he looked like a mirage.

Normally, that would have meant that she had succeeded in weakening him and a once in a lifetime chance had arrived.

However…

"…!!"

Misaka Worst gave a short breath and used magnetism to shoot a nail.

The nail flew accurately towards Accelerator's forehead at over the speed of sound. Accelerator did not evade it. He did not swing his head to the side or even shut his eyes. Even so, not a millimeter of his skin was torn and not a drop of his blood was shed.

He had reflected it.

The nail flew back and accurately stabbed into Misaka Worst's arm. There was no hesitation in Accelerator's actions. Misaka Worst fell to the ground and pulled out another nail. This time she aimed for Last Order. She stretched out her arm and attempted to destroy the core of the network that handled Accelerator's

calculations.

The mirage-like Accelerator moved precisely.

He altered the vectors for his leg strength to instantaneously approach and then mercilessly swung his fist down on Misaka Worst's outstretched arm.

It broke.

Her arm still held the nails as he put strength into breaking it.

She screamed and detonated the air with a high voltage current in order to move back. However, Accelerator grabbed her leg and slammed her down onto the snow.

A great vibration spread through the area like at a fireworks show.

Misaka Worst coughed as he swung his fist down again.

The sounds of flesh being struck, bones creaking, and blood splattering continued.

It seemed Misaka Worst had a means of interfering with Accelerator's electrode, but he did not give her the chance to use it. The continuous pain prevented her from concentrating long enough to use her power.

As he did this, Accelerator felt something inside him collapsing. He hadn't been walking on a path that brought much admiration, but he still felt himself utterly losing the way of life that he had shoddily built for himself. Even if he made an enemy of the entire world or had to crawl through that bloody world as he fought terrible monsters, he had sworn that he would protect the girls who held that face. He could feel that collapsing.

No, that wasn't it.

It wasn't collapsing.

It wasn't disappearing into nothingness.

It was worse than that.

He could tell that he was transforming into a monster much more fearsome than he had been before he met Last Order while he was taking part in the experiment.

“Ha ha ha.”

The next thing he knew, Misaka Worst was no longer moving.

“…It hurts…Misaka…is…”

She was just barely managing to breath and her body was split open in places. Her arm was bent at an odd angle. Her well-featured face was swollen. One of the girls that he had sworn to protect with his life was barely breathing.

“Help Misaka. Someone…”

Accelerator was aware of that.

As he knelt down on the snow, he knew that his hands were stained with blood.

“Gya ha ha ha ha ha!! Gyyaaah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

Only his dry laugh filled the area.

It was over. He could no longer move. What were the people in Academy City doing? He couldn’t deal with them. He couldn’t deal with a world that prospered from their power. He felt a darkness hidden behind all the peace, all the fortune, and every smile in the world. Just as the huge smiles in TV commercials were created to build up huge fortunes, he could no longer believe that the light that he had looked up to was actually good.

It would likely not end there.

Even if the #1’s heart remained unbroken there, a second and third plan would be carried out. Different Sisters might appear, clones made to look exactly like that brat could appear, Yomikawa and Yoshikawa could be used, and completely unrelated towns and cities could be utterly destroyed.

In any case, he was at his limit. In the future, his enemy would surely give him even greater pain. He couldn’t withstand that. He didn’t want to take that on. It

would probably be easier if he just broke then. The darkness created by Academy City was not normal.

He then heard a noise.

Even after being so utterly beaten, Misaka Worst was squirming in the red-stained snow.

Misaka Worst had previously said that she had a way of using her power to stop Accelerator from using the Misaka Network for his calculations.

In the previous barrage, she had not had a chance to use it.

She may have been trying to use it as a counterattack.

While still smiling, Accelerator shook his head. He did not know why he did so. However, he did not want to move any more than that. He didn't care anymore. His heart hurt so much that everything he had been holding inside it up to that point had disappeared. With the inside of his heart in the state it was, Accelerator did not care if he just died there.

But Academy City had done something beyond what Accelerator had been expecting.

He heard a small noise.

It was the sound of the selectors embedded within Misaka Worst's body rupturing.

"…Ha?"

Whatever happened from then on, the damage to his mind was at its upper limit.

There was no greater pain than what he was in.

Misaka Worst's harassment of mental attacks was supposed to be over.

Because he had thought that, his thoughts were completely washed away for an instant.

All of the waves of emotion completely leveled off.

And immediately afterwards, every emotion a human could possess exploded within his head.

“Kha ha ha!? Ga ha ha ha!! Gyaaahh ha ha ha

Up to that point, he had thought they were thinking that weakening him via his trauma and killing him was fine, but he would also be mentally destroyed by the fact that he had killed a Sister even if she lost.

However, he had been wrong.

They hadn't been that kind.

It wasn't an issue of whether he won or not.

They had a means of finishing off Accelerator whether he won, lost, tied, fled, reconciled, or brought the situation to any other conclusion. That was the purpose of the girl known as Misaka Worst.

The word "collapse" came to mind.

From a mental standpoint, Academy City's #1 could be thought of as truly dead.

Accelerator's heart had been almost completely broken.

He had lost the strength needed to act as a human.

He did not want to live in such a rotten world and he did not think he could change a world that rotten. The world was done for. It wasn't at a level where a human could do anything about it. If it would take him from that world, it might be better to just sink down into that snow.

Misaka Worst's body squirmed around.

She was not in control of those movements.

She was probably in shock due to loss of blood.

That was the result the rotten people from Academy City had brought about.

The worst possible result was playing out before Accelerator's eyes.

"Fuck thaaa

His power was vector transformation.

He mainly used the power for attack, but that wasn't all it could be used for. He could read the direction of the flow of blood and electrical signals within a person's body to check on their condition. If he went even deeper, he could use it to perform a certain level of treatment and first aid.

"Fuck that, fuck that, fuck that!!"

Accelerator's eyes were bloodshot.

He had a new goal.

It was a tiny bit of defiance.

"This was all a plan by those Academy City fuckers… Someone is sipping a drink in a warm room and smiling as this brat dies no matter how I struggle and my mind is torn to pieces. Every single bit of this is part of their plan…"

His emotions boiled up.

Those emotions were the driving force needed for him to act as a human.

"Then I'll destroy that plan of theirs!! If this brat has to die for their plan to succeed, then I'll save her with my own hands and make it fail!! I'll show you, you pieces of shit!! I'll smash those relaxed expressions from your faces!!"

Overwhelming anger and clear determination resided in Accelerator's eyes.

"You god damn fucking pieces of shit!! You rotten fuckers look down on me thinking my powers can only be used to kill!! I'll show you right now!! Just like when I saved that brat from Amai's virus back then, I'll show you that I have the power to
proteeee

Part 8

Her dimmed vision never cut out completely.

Eventually, Misaka Worst realized that meant she was still alive.

Selectors had been embedded in her body in order to reject signals from Last Order. She had detonated them of her own will. The explosions had been exceedingly small ones, but many fragments were sent deep into her body. Normally, there would have been no way to save her. It would have been impossible even if she underwent surgery in a hospital that had the latest equipment. There was even less that could be done for her on that snowy plain with nothing at all around.

She was a disposable unit.

Even if she had won there, no other use for her had been thought of. She was a unit that had been expected to die before the proper network of the Third Season had been constructed.

And yet…

(…?)

Time passed, but she never died.

She continued to be in that vague condition of life. She was able to guess that she would be back to having stable vitals before long.

Had she survived?

Had Academy City's plan failed?

Had Academy City's #1 Level 5 been able to overcome a global level of malice?

She was made to easily pick up negative emotions from the network, but what had happened was difficult for her to pick up. However, the reality was that

Misaka Worst had survived a situation where she was supposed to have died no matter what. And it had happened by the hands of a third party.

She remained silent for a bit.

As she was created to take in only negative emotions, that silence was out of bewilderment but also somehow comfortable.

But…

“Gya ha.”

She heard an unpleasant noise.

It sounded like whatever it was she was finally bringing inside was shattering.

“Gya ha ha. That’s it. It’s over. Kah ha ha ha ha ha ha.”

The wave of that voice was not stable. It wavered between high pitched and low pitched, loud and quiet. The sound gave her a much greater sense of danger than even the sound of leaking gas.

Misaka Worst slowly turned her head.

And what she saw was…

“Ehya ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!! I can’t hold back!! That brat’s smile isn’t enough to stop it!! Gya ha! Gya ha ha ha ha!! I’ll destroy it all! I’ll blow it all away!! I’ll kill those who rejoiced at creating this and those who have gained happiness from its benefits! Every single one!! Every single fucking one!! Gya ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

Those wings seemed to be a manifestation of every kind of despair.

The pair of wings intertwined with each other and tore at each other as if they were both attempting to crush the other. It was probably an external representation of the movements within his heart. A scream surged from Accelerator's throat. The air trembled and the excess energy caused the white Russian land to creak and groan under stress. A spider web of cracks raced along the ground with Accelerator's feet in the center.

Misaka Worst could not tell how far the cracks stretched.

That scene may have been something from the end of the world.

What Misaka Worst had been starting to hold inside a bit before may have not been wrong.

That same warm thing may have been flowing through Academy City's #1 Level 5 as well.

However, it had been shattered.

She may have pulled some sort of trigger. As Misaka Worst finally began to realize that, she started to tremble uncontrollably.

Part 9

The anti-aircraft gun attacking the village had been stopped.

The infantry spread around the area were the ones who had been aboard the armored vehicle that was stuck in the basement of the clinic. They had not been equipped for a genuine battle. They may have been more trained as soldiers, but

the village had more people armed with assault rifles. After all, those rifles were more ubiquitous there than fire extinguishers.

With the gun barrels pointed at each other, both sides stopped moving.

However, the privateers' armored vehicle and anti-aircraft gun had been destroyed. That fact had uplifted the villagers' spirits keeping the intense fear they would normally be feeling away.

It didn't take long for a disturbance to spread through the privateers when they saw the villagers resolutely staying in place without taking even a step back. If either side snapped and a firefight broke out, both sides would be taken out. The privateers had come to the battlefield with the idea that it would be like a murder tour, so they had never thought it would turn out like that.

It didn't take long for their spirits to break and their hands to rise into the air.

Since they assumed they would be saved if they did that, they may not have understood the enormity of what they had been doing.

"…We performed body checks and then threw them into the shelter that's still usable," Digurv reported to Hamazura.

Hamazura was having his various scrapes disinfected.

"I see."

"Honestly, I kind of want to break their legs and feed them to wild dogs and some people are suggesting we do just that. If you, the person who blew away the anti-aircraft gun, hadn't requested we spare them, they probably wouldn't have listened."

"…"

Hamazura thought for a bit about the weight of the handgun in his pocket.

In the end, Hamazura had not been able to shoot the soldiers who had exited the immovable anti-aircraft gun. No matter how horrible they were, he hadn't been able to pull the trigger. If they had been about to take his life in that instant, he would probably have fired. He wouldn't have had time to think about it in that

situation. However, he had been given time to think about it then. He had been given time to think about the fact that they were human, too.

At any rate, the danger was gone at least temporarily.

He wanted to bring an end to his brutal thought patterns.

Most of the buildings had been turned to rubble, but even so the people would be happier. The fact that they had not shot the surrendering privateers would surely become a large strength for that village one day. That was how Hamazura wanted to think about it.

And yet…

“Come here!! This is bad! This is even worse than the previous ones!!” someone yelled in Russian.

Hamazura could not understand the person, but it didn’t sound like it could be anything good. He ran over along with Digurv to find a large number of people gathered in one of the intact buildings. They weren’t just escaping the cold. Something like an old fashioned television was inside. It was displaying green points of light.

“It’s an old radar,” explained Digurv. “It detects reflections from reactions with metal and displays them. The closer to the center, the closer to the village. Objects next to the ground won’t show up on here.”

“What are those 3 points?”

“They’re large objects. They may be greater than 30 meters. They don’t seem to be fighters, so that means…”

“What?”

“Helicopters.” Digurv’s expression visibly changed from the tension saying that word brought him. “They’re attack helicopters made to bomb the surface. We don’t know the specific type, but they’re rather large. If all 3 are attack helicopters, then we can’t deal with them with only what we have in the village. This isn’t something you can deal with by grabbing a landmine.”

The village had AK assault rifles, but those would not hit a helicopter. Attack helicopters had thinner armor compared to a tank or an anti-aircraft gun, but they moved around much faster. Even handheld surface to air missiles had to be fired from behind them or they could be avoided.

And if their enemy could move quickly, that also meant that it would be difficult to escape. They would be caught almost instantly even if they did have cars to escape in. They wouldn't be able to withstand the missiles and machine gun fire being sent down from the sky.

"…Is this more privateers?"

"Probably. If it were a normal operation, they wouldn't be coming with just one type of weapon like that. The usual theory is to bring together different types of weapons or different branches of the army to cover each other's weaknesses, but those types of theories mean nothing to the privateers."

Most likely, the second wave was being sent in because the other vehicles had not returned. However, their tenacity did not come from the usual source. Instead of coming out of revenge for their fallen comrades, they were attacking fiercely in order to rid themselves of the shame of a defeat.

"We can't use any basements anymore. The previous attack did a lot of damage. If a missile is fired from above, we'd just be buried alive," Digurv said to Hamazura as he spread out a map.

He had already explained the basic plan to the others in Russian.

"There is a forest to the south of the village. The branches and leaves obstruct the view from the sky. We have no choice but to flee into the forest and spread out as much as possible. Before they realize that, the helicopters will likely primarily aim for the village."

Digurv's instruction to "spread out as much as possible" bothered Hamazura.

Most likely, the helicopters had sensors that could detect heat sources and magnetism. If they bunched together in the forest, the pilot would know there was a group of people there. If they instead spread out, their chances of surviving went up because they might be mistaken for a larger animal traveling through the forest.

However, that was not the true reason.

In reality, spreading out ensured that fewer people would die at one time if the helicopters fired randomly into the forest.

(…We can’t keep the casualties down to zero.)

Everyone there understood that fact.

But they were all too scared to put it to words.

Hamazura couldn’t accept that. He cut off Digurv’s explanation and spoke.

“…We might be able to win using an anti-aircraft gun.”

“What, so you want to send up a barrage of bullets to shoot them down? But this isn’t a Russian military facility. We don’t have any weapons like that just lying arou—!!”

Digurv trailed off and gulped.

He had realized it.

He had recalled that the vehicle Hamazura had previously taken out was a mobile anti-aircraft gun on treads.

Hamazura brushed away the map that had been brought out in preparation to flee and then spoke to Digurv.

“Do you have any construction equipment? Like a digger or something!? If we can just get that rubble off of the anti-aircraft gun, we can do something about this!!”

“But…”

“So you’re saying we should do nothing and let them kill us!? Other than getting the anti-aircraft gun moving, the plan stays the same. The others will still go hide in the southern forest. It’ll just be getting them away from the battlefield this way! Having more plans is better, right!? And even if I fail and they manage to blow away the anti-aircraft gun I’m on, they might even leave satisfied with the

fact that they took out an enemy that put up a fight!! It's a lot better than doing nothing, right!?"

Digurv ran toward the exit of the building.

Hamazura followed him.

It seemed they had a digger used to dig up snow when it accumulated up to a few meters and sealed off traffic.

Hamazura had used construction equipment like that before when stealing ATMs in Academy City.

He removed the rubble from atop the anti-aircraft gun.

The treads were not damaged.

However, one of the two large machine guns had been badly bent. If they fired with it like that, they would clearly damage themselves. But Hamazura and the others did not have the specialized knowledge needed to remove that gun. As a stopgap measure, they removed all the ammunition from the damaged gun. That way, only the properly functioning gun would be able to fire.

"That lowers the accuracy by quite a bit," said Digurv. "Why do you think they put two guns pointing in the same direction? Because they almost never hit. Guns made for anti-aircraft purposes almost never use a single gun. With this kind of weapon, they usually prepare dozens of the same vehicle to cover a portion of the sky and have a few bullets hit and shoot down the target."

"I'm not complaining," said Hamazura cutting him off. "Of course we don't have an ideal weapon. All I need is a slight chance. I'm not just going to stare up into the sky waiting to be killed. As long as I have a chance to do something with my own strength, that's enough."

"Do you even know how to operate this thing?"

"The part dealing with the treads is basically the same as the digger, right?"

A bitter smile appeared on Digurv's face as he watched Hamazura climb up on top of the battered vehicle.

“Antiaircraft guns are not made to be operated by one person.”

“What?”

“Someone to move the vehicle, someone to aim the guns and fire, and someone to keep track of the surroundings and command the others…At the very least, three people are needed. To operate it at normal specs, five are needed.”

Hamazura stopped moving.

If he were to do it alone, he would have to stop the other two jobs to do any one of them. There may not have been much point in trying to evade an attack helicopter that could freely fly through the sky, but moving as he fought would improve his chances of surviving over just firing from a single position.

“So let me go with you,” Digurv added. “I’ll go talk to the others from the village. With two or three of them, we can actually get that anti-aircraft gun going. I’m more worried about everyone who hears about it asking to help fight then no one volunteering.”

“W-wait a second,” Hamazura said in shock.

He felt a different type of tension from the one when he was just heading to the battlefield alone.

“Is that really okay? As you said before, there’s no guarantee we’ll win. It’s a lot more likely that this half-broken anti-aircraft gun will be taken out by the three attack helicopters.”

“Hey,” someone suddenly called out in Japanese.

Hamazura and Digurv turned around and then looked puzzled.

It was the frostbitten soldier who had called out to them.

“Let me help you. I was stationed at an air force base, but I was trained in using these anti-aircraft weapons before I was transferred there. You’ll have a better chance of winning with an actual soldier helping, right?”

“…Wh-what? But the privateers are part of the Russian army, right?” Hamazura

asked a bit suspiciously.

However, the Russian spat out some words in response.

“Those pieces of shit are not part of the Russian army.”

“…”

“You all saved me when no one would have blamed you for abandoning me and they tried to kill you like you were worms. …I’ve had enough. Fuck being a soldier. I don’t care if they come after me for this. I can just defect to the Elizalina Alliance if I have to. Repaying my debt is more important. I’ll use these skills of mine to help those who saved my life.”

“…I see.” Digurv’s shoulders relaxed and he smiled. “It seems you feared getting us wrapped up in this more than you thought. I don’t want to let someone with that expression die. I’ll fight fair and square for that reason. …And if we’re going to bet on this chance, it would be better if you weren’t alone. I’ve had enough of the privateers’ way of doing things, too.”

Hearing that, Hamazura silently lowered his head.

He silently reflected on how reassuring it was to fight together.

He then turned back towards the anti-aircraft gun.

It was the weapon Hamazura had won from the enemy.

It was the final chance to save the girl who was more important to him than his own life and to save the people who had been worried about that girl.

He couldn’t let them lose.

Hamazura Shiage strongly reaffirmed that inside his own head.

The foreign mercenaries that were on a murder tour would be there before long in their attack helicopters.

Part 10

Something in Accelerator’s heart shattered.

The black wings on his back, the symbol of "Evil", kept growing.

It would come to a halt soon, like a dying flame with its fuel spent, for his heart, the source of his negative emotions, had lost its core.

Just at that moment, a convoy driving past appeared in his line of sight. There were several large vehicles moving along in the snow. Judging from the level of technology of those vehicles, they didn't appear to originate from Academy City, but he couldn't rule out the possibility that it might be Academy City's forces disguised as Russia's.

If he was his normal self, he would have observed intently, considering the possibility that they might be from the dark side. But the current Accelerator, his will lost, couldn't be bothered. He wouldn't have cared even if he was shot.

However, the empty shell that was once his heart, shook.

All because of the face of one person, whom he chanced upon in one of the vehicles.

It was the face of the guy who had defeated him back in Academy City’s train switchyard - the one who stopped the "Experiment", permanently froze the Level 6 Shift project, and saved 10,000 Sisters. He would step up to help those in need whenever he could. No matter how despairing any situation was, he would still reach his hand out to those who had nowhere left to go. That was the kind of guy he was.

He should still be in Academy City.

Why is he in Russia?

And that Hero, who was completely different to the apathetic #1 of Academy City, the one who could lift people out of their pits of despair,

How could he pass by without realizing Last Order's pain, who was so close to him?

Unknowingly, Accelerator let out a mighty roar, and directed the vectors of a large boulder buried under the snow to the end of the vehicle. Like a balloon, the end burst open, and the convoy stopped. He knew how unreasonable he was, to ask that person to do something which he had given up.

Even so...

“Aren’t you the Hero who saved the Sisters? The one who saved almost 10,000 lives by himself?”

That person jumped out from the vehicle.

He seemed to have noticed Accelerator's black wings.

“If you are, please save that brat’s life!! Why must she, who has done nothing wrong, be the only one to suffer so much!?” WHYYY?!

His black wings grew even larger with that roar.

He knew he was wrong to begin with.

And yet, he could no longer restrain his power.

Not even Last Order's smile, the symbol of all things good and pure, could stop him.

The battle against Academy City's #1, a monster who has surpassed his limits from his insurmountable anger, had begun.

Between the Lines 3

Misaka Mikoto was serious about searching through Academy City's data.

She had seen that boy on the edge of a video from Russia on the news. He truly wasn't in Japan. And he was walking around nonchalantly in the most dangerous place in that war. There was something there. Without Mikoto knowing, that boy may have been once more fighting some great evil with his clenched right fist.

Focusing on the screen of the PDA, she gathered a few pieces of information.

She had a bad feeling.

She recalled the time when she had desperately attempted to gain any information she could on the experiment involving the Sisters.

She read what it said on the screen.

"Concerning Imagine Breaker being spotted in Russia and in the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations."

Imagine Breaker referred to that spiky haired boy. She had a vague recollection of him referring to his power that way.

Mikoto scrolled down.

There were a few maps with remarks written next to them. A couple of arrows were drawn on the maps. They probably referred to the movements of the Academy City forces or to the path taken by that boy.

"According to the directive from the chairman of the board of directors, Imagine Breaker will be dealt with differently than the normal method."

It seemed the "normal method" referred to the method of suppressing a force that was attempting to leak information on Academy City's psychic powers development technology to an external organization. It was a very strict method that could even give the approval to have people shot.

However, it seemed that method did not apply to that boy.

Mikoto almost felt relieved.

But she realized she was being naïve.

In the Sisters incident, she had seen much more than she would have liked exactly how dark the underside of Academy City could get.

“Imagine Breaker is an esper who has great value even among every esper in Academy City. Keeping that value in mind, try to retrieve him while doing your very best to keep him alive. However, if it becomes clear that Imagine Breaker has sided with an organization other than Academy City, promptly attack him and ‘retrieve’ him within the same life support system as used for the #2. Your secondary objective should be to keep this chaos from growing any further. Currently, it has been confirmed that Imagine Breaker is travelling with someone from an external organization. If this person is merely being used as a temporary guide, then the issue does not need to be dealt with, but carry out your secondary objective if it becomes clear that it is more than that. We have the approval of the chairman, so there will be no problem. At your level of authority, you cannot view the details, but the chairman’s plan will continue.”

“…”

Misaka Mikoto remained silent for a bit.

She was surprised, but she had also half expected something like that.

On the PDA, she could see detailed plans on how to attack that boy. It had the personnel and equipment for the unit to parachute down and a mission schedule. Of course, the military airplane was waiting in District 23, the district that focused on air and space technology.

Mikoto turned off the PDA and headed for District 23.

That boy had once risked his life and stood up to Academy City’s great darkness in order to stop the massacre of the Sisters in the Level 6 Shift project. That boy may not have accurately imagined just how terrifying a thing he was standing up to, but the fact that he had crossed that dangerous bridge for Mikoto and for her “younger sisters” remained.

She was greatly indebted to that boy.

As Mikoto ran, she decided that it was about time she repaid him for that at least

a little bit.

Chapter 4: Now is the Time to Strike Back.
Heroes_Congregate.

Part 1

The three attack helicopters supplied by the Russian army flew across the white landscape. The large helicopters flew at 300 kph and were loaded with a large amount of ammunition. The sound of their rotors was deafening. Helicopters gave the image of making a great din as they flew through the sky, but the military ones were ingeniously constructed so they flew almost silently.

These were different from that ideal design.

They were quite different from the American military ones that were small, fast, and quiet. The mere fact that each one required 3 people to pilot it showed that they were not the usual type of helicopter. The kings of the skies felt no need to hide. In exchange, they could load as much ammunition as possible and damage the enemy as much as possible. That was the point of those helicopters.

Dogfights that required both speed and mobility would be completely left to the fighters like the Migs and Sukhois, so battles against other helicopters were not even taken into account with their design. Instead, they were designed to utterly destroy targets on the ground. After all, those attack helicopters belonged to the army instead of the air force.

“Nice. This layout isn’t bad,” muttered one of the privateer pilots.

They did not have common nationality, religion, race, gender, or age. Even their favorite genres of music were interestingly mixed.

They only had one thing in common.

They wanted to kill people and they wanted to do so in a one-sided way.

“This is a prototype developed by one of the large armies hovering between being 1st or 2nd in the world. I love it. In a side scrolling shooter, this would be the player’s craft.”

“This isn’t just a test run for the craft itself,” said another pilot in a transmission from one of the other attack helicopters in the formation. “This is a strategy test to see whether a large craft can realistically be used for something like this. The theory this operation is based on might not even work. …If the actual Russian army were doing this, they would be using the basic pattern of using smaller helicopters and fighters. There could be some disadvantages to this. Particularly, our larger width will make us easier to attack from the ground.”

“That doesn’t matter. We just have to take them out before they take us out. We just have to fire a missile from long range before we even get in range of their weapons. That’s what the larger helicopters are for. Just like in a side scrolling shooter, we just have to fire like crazy without worrying about how much ammo we have left.”

As they spoke, they were getting closer to the target point.

It was a small village that seemed to be full of nothing but rubble.

It seemed the armored vehicle and anti-aircraft gun that had gone in first had met resistance and been taken out. However, they didn’t particularly care. It didn’t matter if the other privateers had been captured or killed. They were just looking forward to their own battle that was about to begin.

The pilot tightly gripped the stick (that unnecessary strength in his grip made it clear he was self taught) and yelled out excitedly while listening to the sound of the rotors.

“Ah ha ha!! Let’s kill them!! Kill them all!!”

Part 2

A low growl escaped Accelerator's throat.

A line of large vehicles was stopped a few dozen meters away. The back of one of the vehicles had been destroyed. The door at the front of the vehicle opened and a boy got out onto the snow.

It was the boy who had once singlehandedly stopped the experiment that called for the killing of the 20,000 Sisters.

Accelerator understood that his rage towards the boy was nothing more than an outburst of anger. His words had no legitimacy or consistency. Anyone watching on would certainly see Accelerator as the one in the wrong.

But if the hero that had stopped that ridiculous experiment were to die for such a ridiculous reason, if the existence Accelerator held up so highly within him as holding tragedy in check were to disappear so easily…

Then the world would probably really and truly come to an end.

"Ooooooooooooooooooooooooohhhh

He raised that arm above his head scattering the pitch black darkness.

“…”

Accelerator’s lips twisted slightly.

What was he thinking deep in his heart now that the boy had not died in the first strike?

Accelerator himself was not entirely sure and he swung the black wings again.

This time it was a horizontal strike.

That strike seemed like it would slice apart every object in the world at chest level and it flew mercilessly towards that Level 0 boy.

The boy once more repelled it with his right hand.

But the situation was not the same.

The boy who had negated the black wings wobbled to the side as if being pushed by a force.

Accelerator knew.

That boy had a secret that allowed him to negate even Academy City’s #1 Level 5 power with a touch.

However, he could not do anything about an attack that blew away everything in a fixed area like a large and strong wind or plasma. Perhaps the boy could not negate an attack that exceeded a certain level of destructive power, perhaps he could not negate a power that affected a large area, or perhaps he did not possess the ability to negate secondary physical phenomena that were caused by a power. Accelerator did not know what the true answer was, but he still knew he could beat down that Level 0 boy even if he didn’t understand the reason or workings behind it.

In other words…

(I’ll smash him to pieces with overwhelming force not giving him a chance to

fight back!!)

He could feel a dull pain deep in his head.

It felt like his right brain and left brain were being split apart and something was bursting out from within.

It was not a normal feeling.

He wasn’t even sure it was part of his powers as Academy City’s #1 Level 5.

He didn’t know what was going to happen.

He might even just disintegrate away.

(So what?)

Accelerator gritted his teeth.

Right there in that place, he had to muster all his strength and truly go all out as he fought.

A wind roared.

One of the wings turned into dozens of sharp stakes and flew forcefully towards the Level 0 boy who was running towards Accelerator. Instead of aiming for that small target from many different angles, the attack was more like a carpet bombing of an entire area that the boy happened to be in.

A shock wave exploded out.

White snow and black dirt exploded up greater than 10 meters into the air obstructing Accelerator’s vision. He could tell huge cracks had appeared in various places on the ground. Distant seismographs had likely detected that shaking.

The boy who had been in the center of the blast could not be fine.

Even with the ability to negate powers with his right hand, he wouldn’t have been able to intercept every single attack.

He had certainly been damaged.

There was no way the Level 0 boy could have saved himself.

And the shock waves created by even one of the dozens of stakes held enough destructive force to smash a human body to pieces.

It had to be over.

With that victory, Accelerator had lost some form of hope.

And yet…

A figure shakily stood before Accelerator.

That Level 0 boy stood on the other side of the dust of white snow and black dirt.

Of course, he was not unscathed.

The boy's clothes were covered in dirt, red blood was leaking from his temple, and his center of gravity seemed to be tilted to the side.

Even so, the boy stood.

He stood on his two legs that would not fall.

"Ha ha ha…" Accelerator laughed weakly.

He didn't understand. That attack was not something the boy should have been able to handle with just his right hand. However, Accelerator clearly laughed. He seemed to be enjoying it. He seemed to enjoy the fact that the theory behind his supposedly undefeatable attack had been overturned.

To him it looked like the image of the unstoppable rails of fate being easily overcome.

"Ha ha ha ha ha!! Gya ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!"

Accelerator laughed as he gathered even greater power into his black wings.

An even worse noise started to come from the inside of his skull.

The Level 0 boy clenched his fist and ran toward Accelerator.

This time, they were not testing the waters.

The true clash began.

Part 3

“They’re on their way,” Digurv muttered with his head sticking out of the top hatch of the anti-aircraft gun and binoculars in one hand.

Hamazura was in the front of the anti-aircraft gun sitting in the seat that allowed him to control the treads and move the vehicle around. He had nothing else to do. Piloting the vehicle was similar to operating a piece of construction equipment like a digger, but he didn’t have the specialized skills needed to operate the radar and aim the guns at the targets.

Hamazura peered out a horizontal slit made of reinforced glass and asked Digurv a question while looking at the snowy plain outside.

“Are they attack helicopters as you thought?”

“Yes, three of them,” Digurv responded without looking over at Hamazura. “They’re of a type I’ve never seen before. They’re quite large. This mission might be doubling as a test of a prototype.”

“Russia has a history of focusing on developing large helicopters,” the frostbitten Russian soldier added.

It seemed his name was Glickin.

“It seems the world’s largest transport helicopter has about the same loading capacity as a C-130 transport plane. Only Russia would try to build a helicopter like that ignoring the practicality of it.”

Hamazura could tell his face was paling as he listened to Glickin’s words.

“If the helicopters are that large, that means they have a lot of ammunition and bombs packed inside, doesn’t it?”

His traced his fingers along the unrefined levers of the controls.

He was trying to calm himself by checking on the existence of their own weapon, but it didn’t help at all.

“Are we really gonna be okay against a cutting edge prototype? Dammit. A busted anti-aircraft gun isn’t enough to take on something like that.”

“No, we might actually have a chance because of that,” Digurv said refuting Hamazura’s words.

“?”

“It’s possible they’re letting those rogue privateers carry out the test rather than the actual army because they don’t have too much faith in those prototypes. If those attack helicopters had been well tested and proven in actual battle, then we would have almost no chance of winning.”

“Either way, our lives are on the line though.”

“Here they come.”

Digurv’s quick comment created great tension within the vehicle.

“…They’re most likely the type of helicopter that focuses on high speed hit & away tactics. They can’t make tight turns, so they fly through the battlefield in a straight line and then make a large U-turn before returning.”

“In other words, this is like a gunfight in a Western. The only way to win is to exchange bullets as they pass.”

The sound of the large rotors resounded throughout the area.

Even through the small slit in front of Hamazura, three shadows could be seen in the white sky. At their current speed, they would pass by overhead in no time at all.

Basically, they could not let those helicopters get by them.

If they couldn’t stop them, they would kill all of the villagers who were fleeing.

“Begin!!”

As Digurv yelled, Hamazura grabbed the lever to control the treads and Glickin reached for the equipment to rotate the gun turret.

The battle began.

When the attack helicopters were 300 meters away, the anti-aircraft gun opened fire. While the space between shots was a bit greater than with a normal machine gun, the sound of each shot was deep and low-pitched like a drum.

The attack helicopters were flying in a formation where each one was the corner of a triangle, but they scattered upon hearing that noise. As they did, an orange spark flew from the surface of one of them. A bullet had hit it. However, it was not shot down.

“Do they have thick armor to go along with their larger size!?”

“Hamazura, turn around! Missiles are going to be pouring down like rain!!”

Hearing Digurv’s shout, Hamazura forcefully backed up the vehicle. The steel treads bit into the ground throwing snow about as they forced the heavy vehicle along.

Treads gave the impression of being slow, but they were in a military vehicle. From the display on the speedometer, it seemed it was set to reach speeds of up to 70 kph.

But the attack helicopters darting through the sky were much, much faster.

“Heh heh heh.”

Meanwhile, the pilot of one of the attack helicopters tightened his grip on the stick and licked his lips in excitement. He could blow that anti-aircraft gun to pieces with either a machine gun or missiles. He would leave the airspace, make a large U-turn, and then lower his altitude to gain the speed needed to aim for the target.

“Idiots! If you survived, you should have just pretended to be dead!! That might have raised your odds of surviving a little!!”

With its attack having failed, the anti-aircraft gun seemed to be desperately trying to flee. However, nothing would work as cover with all the sensors the attack helicopter had. The pilot raised the safety cover on the top of the stick with his thumb and pressed the red button that fired a missile.

A small missile with white smoke trailing behind it shot towards the anti-aircraft gun. It was already too late for them to attempt to evade. The treaded vehicle simply didn’t have the speed needed to do so. It seemed they were trying to flee into a forest of tall conifer trees, but it was too late to hide. The missile had already been fired.

“Ah ha!! Blow them to pieces!!” yelled the pilot, but things did not turn out as he wanted.

The vehicle had hidden behind the branches of the tall conifer trees. The missile struck the tops of the trees that were spread out like a roof over the anti-aircraft gun.

Flames and a shock wave spread out, but the anti-aircraft gun was unharmed even with its thinner armor compared to a tank. The trees were blown to pieces by the missile and the pieces rained down over the area.

And…

“Learn the purpose behind an opening, you pieces of shit!! Glickin!!”

In response to Hamazura’s yell, Glickin operated the lever controlling the gun turret. A surface-to-air missile equipped on the side of the machine guns fired off into the sky.

It flew up toward the sky that had previously been obstructed by the trees.

However, the missile flew through the opening created by the attack from the helicopter.

“!?”

The pilot’s throat dried, but the missile did not fly towards him. Instead, it struck one of the other helicopters that was flying alongside and preparing for a second wave.

An explosion and black smoke stained the Russian sky.

The attack helicopter became an orange mass and crashed into the white snow-covered ground creating an even bigger explosion.

However, the pilot felt no sorrow over his fellow privateers being shot down.

He only felt anger towards his business being given a bad name.

“Let’s make it rain,” he said into the radio contacting the other remaining helicopter. “The trees obstruct our missiles, so let’s turn them to Swiss cheese with a shower of machine gun fire!!”

The two helicopters moved away from each other. They U-turned and headed at high speed toward the forest where the anti-aircraft gun was hiding.

They started firing from two different directions at the same time.

The anti-aircraft gun hurriedly hid itself among the trees, but the same trick would not keep working. The attack helicopters’ sensors detected a large metal object and they could tear through the trees like paper with their 30 mm Gatling guns. Their cover would not work that time.

But then the pilot looked at the radar again.

“Ah!?” the pilot exclaimed in puzzlement.

The radar display was odd. He was confused for a second, but he still accurately operated the stick. He opened fire on the ground with the Gatling gun.

Matching the movement of the helicopter, a straight line of bullets raced along the white ground.

A number of thick trees splintered to pieces and large holes were opened up in the mass of metal hidden there. It wasn't just a few holes. They continued along one after another like from a giant sewing machine.

An explosion spread out within the forest.

He had utterly destroyed his target…or so he thought.

The pilot's expression was not one of joy.

"Hey, what's going on?" The pilot's expression was one of disturbance and irritation as he spoke to the other privateers. "Why did the number of objects on the radar grow!? It didn't feel like I actually hit something!!"

If there was only one anti-aircraft gun in the forest, that phenomenon was impossible. And then a transmission came in answering his question.

"Look, it's a car! To avoid being targeted, they hid all the vehicles from the village around the forest!! We targeted the wrong metal object detected by the —!?"

The transmission cut out.

Orange sparks flew. The other attack helicopter's armor had been penetrated. The helicopter had been hit by an attack form the anti-aircraft gun and it exploded in midair.

"…"

The remaining pilot had the option of returning to the base, but he did not choose to do so.

One reason for that was the blood rushing to his head.

But the bigger reason was the fact that the spray of machine gun fire before had mown down most of the trees in the forest. The anti-aircraft gun could no longer hide. Even if they tried to hide among the other vehicles, it would not lead him

astray when he could see the thing by sight.

“You. Are. Dead.”

The pilot withdrew to a distance where the anti-aircraft gun could not reach him and then made a large U-turn.

He would end this in the next run.

Without any cover, the anti-aircraft gun finally had no way of avoiding the attack from above.

“Gya ha ha ha ha ha ha!! I’ll turn you to Swiss cheese!!”

Part 4

British and French magicians were fighting atop the solidified ocean surface in the Strait of Dover. The British forces were advancing due to Second Princess Carissa and the knights heading to the front lines. The knights were especially helpful as they were receiving power from Curtana Second using the mobile fortress Glastonbury. Knight Leader was using his spell that allowed him to nullify the power of any weapon he was aware of. Ignoring the usual national border, the knights were wielding their swords freely.

They were pushing back the French magicians, but Knight Leader’s expression was not a positive one.

“…I suppose it just goes with the job to fear that a string of easy wins is just the enemy’s preparation for a hidden weapon.”

“Given who we’re up against, that isn’t exactly unlikely.”

“…”

Knight Leader remained silent after hearing Carissa’s response.

Common sense wouldn’t cut it against their opponent.

The tactician on the French side was known as either the brains or the Holy Woman and she had a strange disposition characteristic of France.

She was a Femme Fatale.

Joan of Arc. Marie Antoinette. Women whose mere presence greatly affected the history of the country whether she herself was good or evil appeared in France again and again. This tactician was yet another example. She was too valuable to just execute and too fearsome to just be set free. As such, she had been imprisoned below Versailles by the French government.

With her as their opponent, it may have been odd that the normal theories were working.

Or perhaps they were already being affected by her Femme Fatale atmosphere by the mere fact that they thought there was something else there.

“The normal method will not work on them,” said Carissa almost off hand. “If they think of themselves as cornered, there is a danger they will start acting violently in a way that would be impossible using normal military actions. Do you know what we must do to prevent that?”

“?”

“We conquer this battlefield without even giving them time to be thrown into disorder. We fight so hard that the enemy is pushed past fear and into dumbfounded amazement.”

“I would rather you did not underestimate us,” said a voice of unknown origin.

It was the Holy Woman who acted as the brains commanding the French magicians from afar.

But Carissa smiled.

“It’s true that you might be able to turn this battle around if you showed up directly,” Carissa said while being protected by a large number of knights. “But you can’t leave Versailles no matter what. Those pitiful long distance attacks aren’t enough to take out my knights. No matter how smart you may be, it doesn’t change how strong the soldiers on the battlefield are. Using your strength well and pulling that strength above the limit are two very different things.”

The second princess smiled, but there was a tinge of disinterest in her tone of voice.

“Our goal is not France. We don’t have time to deal with you, so just open up a path for us without bringing on unnecessary damage. You’re supposed to be the brains, right? Don’t tell me you can’t even figure out what the best course of action is here.”

“Heh heh,” the Femme Fatale laughed. “You know I am a person who uses her head, so why did you never think of this possibility?”

“What?”

Carissa narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

Knight Leader who was standing next to her was blown away by a huge impact.

“!?”

Carissa did not even have time to be surprised.

A woman had suddenly flown over. She was wearing a splendid dress mostly made of loose white cloth. However, in contrast to the dress, her skin was unhealthily pale and her eyes were sunken in. She was holding a sword, but it did not suit her. It was a similar image to a youth who spent all his time reading books in a corner of the library swinging a baseball bat around.

She was…

“…Having me take action is actually the best plan for France.”

The showy Western sword that was mostly red and gold turned in Carissa’s direction.

Knight Leader reacted first.

“To zero!!”

That statement should have nullified all attack power of the weapon the Femme Fatale held. It should have become even more harmless than a sponge.

However…

“How naïve,” the Femme Fatale stated quietly. “The histories of England and France are actually surprisingly intertwined. In fact, the British King William I was originally a French noble.”

As she did not take any immediate action, she may have been certain of her victory.

“…Your spell does not work on weapons related to the Royal Family, correct?”

“Ah…!?”

Seeing Knight Leader’s surprise, the Femme Fatale swung her Western sword.

Its speed exceeded that of sound.

It was most likely a special sword that used spells unique to France similar to Curtana.

Carissa had no means of defending herself.

The knights were borrowing power from Curtana Second, but Queen Elizard held the sword itself. Carissa was not receiving the benefits of the sword and even if the knights threw themselves in front of Carissa to protect her, the Femme Fatale’s sword would slice straight through that shield and continue on to slice through Carissa.

And then…

A high pitched clang rang out.

The blade in Second Princess Carissa's hand competed with the supposedly unstoppable strike.

She was supposed to have lost Curtana Original at the end of the coup d'etat.

Curtana Second was with Elizard, so Carissa should not have had any power.

"Durendal, hm?" Carissa said.

Her body had not been sliced in two. She was completely unscathed. Carissa alone was smiling as their swords were locked together at close range.

"How?" muttered the Femme Fatale.

Carissa was holding a silver piece of metal only a few centimeters long. A sword of light was protruding from it. Given the power of the weapon the Femme Fatale held, that should not have been possible. She held the sword of France. It was the destructive power of France itself. To compete with that, it had to be Curtana, but…

"You're the one that said the histories of England and France are surprisingly intertwined."

"What?"

"It's the same idea that your king, Charlemagne, had. He put a fragment of a holy spear in the hilt of his sword to give it sacred power and value, right?"

"You don't mean…?" The Femme Fatale looked back at the small piece of metal. "That's a fragment of Curtana Second!?"

"When I fought my mother, Curtana Original and Curtana Second clashed. This is a byproduct of that. …But I never expected it to display this much power just by being in the hands of a member of the Royal Family. Just destroying it isn't enough. I truly hate this sword because of all these loopholes and secret tricks. …I hate it enough to start a coup d'etat over it."

An explosion of magical power was created between Carissa and the Femme Fatale.

They both fell back a bit and held their swords up again.

“Having me take action is actually the greatest secret plan for England.”

Part 5

Accelerator made a simple move.

The black wings behind him both swung downwards. Except, that this time his target wasn’t the Level 0 teen that’s running towards him,

But towards the empty white land in front of him.

The sound of an explosion rang out.

With the massive destructive power, large amounts of earth got swept up, and formed into a 15m high and 300m wide tsunami made of earth. The entire vista got covered by it, and it struck as if to swallow the tiny lad.

He should be dead with this attack.

Even if he was wearing military-use power armor, his body of flesh and blood would be crushed along with the synthetic materials of the body armor.

Even so.

Pacha!!* The Level 0 charged right into the soaring earth.

His body got pummeled by massive amounts of rocks, but none were fatal attacks.

“…”

Accelerator was shocked at first, but soon figured out his tactics from the situation.

From previous reports about Academy City’s #3, Railgun, who Accelerator had faced off against before, in the rumors associated with the Railgun, there was one saying that an unknown Level 0 existed that could match against the Railgun using only his right hand.

This raised many questions.

For example, even if a right hand that could negate any ability exists, how could the one using it match his opponent’s timing?

A railgun attack was over three times the speed of sound, and lightning strikes were even faster. Even with a method of defending himself, to be able to time it right was extremely difficult. Even missing the timing by only an instant would probably result in death. In that situation, how could the scenario "Every single attack is negated easily" happen?

From the situation now, Accelerator could make a rough estimate.

In other words,

Precognition.[1]

For example, when the Railgun used her ability, she would give off weak magnetic fields and electromagnetic waves that would make the metal items around her resonate. Because of the eventual large explosion, the Railgun herself probably wouldn't notice these tiny vibrations like an earthquake's precursor. 'To see the invisible magnetic force, spread iron sand onto it to make it visible to the naked eye', just like an elementary school experiment. So, because of these "An Involuntary Movements", there would be hints to when the Railgun would attack.

Of course, that was not all.

That was not the only kind.

Even though her ability was more common compared to Accelerator's ability, she was still the #3 esper of Academy City, and shouldn't be blocked that easily.

There were probably other reasons as well.

For example, the lightning strike.

If it was only high voltage electricity flow, by extending his right hand the lightning would be attracted onto it, with the right hand acting like a lightning rod.

Also, the iron-sand sword.

Apart from the sword in her hand, the iron sand around her would also change shape due to the magnetic force. In other words, a 'visible magnetic path' would be formed that could be used to predict where the strike would end up. Depending on the situation, he could even negate the sword without coming in contact with it just by touching the iron sand around him.

Sometimes the path to victory would change.

Was it using the most powerful ability one possessed, or the aftermath from that ability?

According to different tactics used, the path to victory changed along with it.

What was most important wasn’t whether there was a chance to victory, but to never rely on only one form, and look at the problem from many different viewpoints. Above all, look for the best method to resolve the current situation. Even against the same kind of espers, the same kind of tactics might not be suited to be used. Even if it was just lightning strikes, depending on how it was used, different tactics may have to be taken.

Because of this, battle tactics were always changing.

By depending on the defense from the ability to negate any ability to avoid being killed instantly, to buy time and use it for maximum gain. By experiencing the impacts on one’s own body and using that data as the basis to find the best way to get out of the situation alive.

Just having brains wasn’t enough.

Just having the power wasn’t enough.

Only by combining the two it was possible to barely succeed.

In the situation where death was only a hair's-breadth away, having the courage to keep his body and thoughts moving probably helped a lot as well.

But,

The Level 0 probably didn’t realize it himself.

How to use his ability in its fullest potential, using the aftermath as a basis, and then change tactics to fight according to the situation. He was probably just combining those with his reflex. As for the Railgun making everything made of metal vibrate around her, he probably didn’t take note of it explicitly but took it in using his peripheral vision, and processed it deep inside him. So, success was not guaranteed. On the other hand, if he actively tried to take note of these things it was more likely to fail.

But,

Just taking Accelerator’s attack and surviving was exceptional in terms of battle

ability. Even if anyone else had this power in their right hand, how many could get the same results?

Taking only the supernatural abilities into account, he definitely couldn't be called 'strong'.

Even if taken everything into account he might still only be at a 'weak' level.

But because that was so,

This teenager knew the meaning of fighting with all his strength if he wanted to live.

" "Uwoooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooohhh!!!!!!!!" "

The roar of the two overlapped.

The Level 0 charged in to where his fist could reach his opponent.

Accelerator raised one of his black wings.

The two attacks flew past each other, and the Level 0's attack hit only an instant earlier. Accelerator's face got blown backwards, and he lost his balance. The black wing's path got diverted slightly, and missed the Level 0 by millimeters.

A shockwave erupted.

With the raging wind, not just the Level 0, even Accelerator got blown several dozens of meters away. Both of them got up from the snow-covered ground, clenched their fists, and charged right at each other.

From inside Accelerator's heart, something black surged out.

It was not directed towards the Level 0, but towards something more indistinct. The hatred and anger towards this illogical and unreasonable world burst out in the form of words.

"Why!! Why didn't anyone save that brat!! Aren't you a hero! The hero that stopped that 'Experiment' with only one fist!! Then go save her! If you can do what no one else can, then you can definitely save that brat!!"

Accompanying the roar, an even larger power surged through the black wings.

At the same time, something that was crumbling in his heart started to fall to pieces.

He could no longer stop.

Even the action of remembering Last Order’s smile could no longer stop the violence.

“It’s ridiculous that a villain who was no better than a piece of shit like me was guarding her!! No matter how you think about it something must have been wrong!! How could I possibly be a hero!! No matter what, I can only choose the blood-stained path!! Why do I have to do all these things!! If a hero like you had shown up earlier, then something like this mix-up of position wouldn’t have happened!! That brat would not had to have suffered as much this way!!”

While the two exchanged blows between fist and wings, the Level 0 probably didn’t know why it had turned out this way either. Accelerator himself probably didn’t know what he wanted to say; it was just air passing through his lips, no one else should be able to understand him.

Instantly, both of them went silent.

They moved their gaze towards the small girl collapsed on the ground.

Then,

The black wings swelled up even more than before.

The pair of wings split into over a hundred, and attacked the Level 0 from all angles.

At the same time where the sound of explosions and shockwaves ran rampant, the ground started to tremble dully.

“(He should be dead now… it’s impossible for him not to be.)”

Accelerator thought.

It was impossible for that not to be the case.

Even so,

“Why…”

Accelerator let out a sound that was almost like a groan.

In the end it turned into a mighty roar.

“Why couldn’t a hero like you just die?! If you die, then everything can finally break apaaaaaaaaaaart!!!!!!!!!!!!”

He heard the reply.

Right in front of him, the teenager that clenched the blood-covered fist spoke:

“… things like heroes are unnecessary.”

Footsteps rang out on the snow.

Fist and wings collided.

The air shook, many attacks impacted, and blood flew out.

“Does a Level 0 like me really seem that incredible?! Hero? Villain? Stop kidding around! Can’t you save someone if you’re not standing at that spot?! In front of your eyes are people that don’t wish to cry that are crying! In front of your eyes are people that can only clench their teeth while struggling and can’t even say the words ‘please save me’! Is that not enough!! Just step up already!! You don’t need special positions or reasons!! With these, you can step up and be a shield for them!!” After letting out those words, the Level 0 became stronger.

Those words weren’t just directed at Accelerator.

His words also slashed away at his own uncertainty.

“I don’t know what you’re trying to protect, nor do I know what you have been hurt by. But, if you want to protect that child then do so with your chest held high!! Here and now, be proud in knowing that you are protecting her!! This is your life right? Then decide for yourself!! If you want to protect everything with

your hands then do so, if you want to abandon everything then do so. But, what do you yourself want to do right now?! Can you really be satisfied giving your most important thing to someone else that you don't really understand?!"

Explosions erupted.

The black wings flew erratically.

Snow and earth flew up high into the air.

But the Level 0 did not fall down. Facing the massive attack that looked like it would swallow him, he protected his vital points and advanced forward.

Thump.

Accelerator felt a chill down his spine.

Until today, Accelerator thought the most frightening thing about Level 0s was their resourcefulness when facing high-leveled espers. Charging in head on and then taking advantage of the small thing the powerful esper missed to deal the decisive blow there.

That was the most terrifying.

Yes.

With the resolve that refused to give up no matter what happened, the enemy that charged towards him right now was the most terrifying existence. The strongest esper of Academy City finally noticed this.

And as proof:

"(That last attack…)"

Accelerator gulped.

"(Even the weakest of those attacks hold destructive power that isn't possibly something a human body can handle, right?!!)"

Those things didn't matter.

The source of his terror was not those superfluous theories.

What was most important right now was ‘the most terrifying enemy’ closing in.

At this time, Accelerator remembered something.

Before, in the cargo holding area fighting the Sisters during the ‘Experiment’, the same kind of clash had happened.

Wasn’t the most terrifying thing about that teenager being that he never gave up, and stood with his own two feet under circumstances where that could not possibly happen?

“Just choose already…”

The Level 0, just like back then in the blood-covered cargo holding area, charged towards the Academy City’s strongest esper. “Do you want to keep protecting with your hands? Or do you want to give it all to someone else and run away? Or do you want me to give you a hand in choosing!!”

That fist,

Clenched to the point where it couldn’t get any tighter.

“Whether it be pride or whatever, for whatever can make you hold your chest up high, just choose already!!”

A roar exploded out.

The sound of the Level 0’s fist struck surely onto Accelerator’s face.

After stepping onto the path of ‘Evil’, the power gained after many coincidences, the black wings do not work against that teenager.

No,

Actually,

The thought of that *it is necessary to step onto the path of ‘Evil’*, was that only a shackle? No matter what, what he had to protect at any cost was Last Order’s smile. This had nothing to do with where she was located. If someone truly

wanted to protect her, it didn't matter if he himself was 'Good' or 'Evil', he didn't even have to surpass people like Kakine.

The kind of person whose shadow he had been chasing all this time was probably an existence like this. It was not because of 'Good' or 'Evil'. And it was because Accelerator didn't consider this, that the 'pure Evil' Accelerator could not reach him. If that was the case…

Accelerator thought even as he fell backwards.

The fantasy that had occupied his heart for all this time had shattered.

And so,

Lessar, the magician travelling with Kamijou Touma, watched their battle from afar.

Observing from the angle of magic, the black wings of the mysterious attacker were like an embodiment of terror. But even more frightening was Kamijou Touma who could suppress even those wings.

"(Just then…)"

Lessar was going over what she had just witnessed once again in her mind.

"(That guy… caught one of the black wings that split into more than a hundred branches and twisted it…?)"

That boy's right hand seemed to have the effect of negating any supernatural power. But, because of limits there were cases where massive powers that couldn't be negated completely ended up only blocked by the right hand. From what she had seen, Fiamma's special giant sword had taken a while before it was erased completely.

Normally speaking, being unable to negate something completely… should be a disadvantage for him.

But,

Just now, that teenager used that ‘flaw’ to deliberately grab a black wing he couldn’t negate completely. Then twist the wing to make the attacker lose his balance, and create a small safe area when he was surrounded completely by the black wings.

Negation and disruption.

Matching his opponent’s strength, and using his ability for the maximum benefit.

Had this cruel war provided an opportunity to greatly enhance that teenager’s power?

But,

“(With only that… is it really possible to have gotten out of that situation…?)”

Even if he could use his right hand to ‘hold’ onto the massive power, just that it was not enough to handle the problem. Even if Lessar had the same power, it would impossible for her to get out of that kind of situation no matter what.

If that was the case,

What exactly just happened?

Was there really no logic to this?

Or was it…

Part 6

Accelerator’s vision flickered in and out.

In his vision, the world was on its side and he could see Last Order. She was still buried in the cold snow. Accelerator finally frowned at that fact and then noticed that someone was crouching down over the girl.

When he entered Russia, that may have been enough to pull the trigger of murder within him, but at that time he could not move.

Crouching next to Last Order was a spiky haired boy. He was staring at the small unconscious girl's face, but he finally moved his right hand toward her forehead. It was a similar action to checking to see if she had a fever.

From that alone, something happened.

A high-pitched noise similar to something solid being shattered echoed throughout the vast white land of Russia.

Accelerator did not understand what that meant.

His consciousness sank into darkness once more.

When he next came to, Accelerator was inside a vehicle.

It was not a civilian car. There was no interior meant for people to ride in or even any windows. Most likely, he was in the back of a truck. The unrefined metal floor and walls raised his caution. He thought that an underground organization from Academy City might have captured him.

But he quickly remembered the convoy made up of various vehicles that spiky haired boy had been riding in. Accelerator might be inside one of them.

There were no vibrations.

The truck was stopped. They may have reached their destination before Accelerator came to.

Last Order was lying by his side.

The unhealthy sweat that had previously been flowing from her body was gone for some reason. That spiky haired boy's right hand might have had some sort of effect when he had touched her before Accelerator had lost consciousness.

However, he was pretty sure that effect was only temporary.

He could use his vector transformation ability to accurately read the disturbances in a human's brain waves. When he used that power to check Last Order's body, he could tell the root of the problem had not been fixed.

Even if she was stable then, it would eventually return.

But the fact that his time limit had been extended remained.

Accelerator did not know what to make of the situation. He felt the pieces of parchment next to him. He found a small memo left next to Last Order's small body.

Given the timing, it was most likely from that spiky haired boy.

He grabbed the scrap of paper and it said: Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

Just before Accelerator had left Academy city, Aiwass had told him to remember that term.

There could be a connection.

The boy's memo might have been pointing toward the key to saving Last Order.

Suddenly, the back door of the stopped truck was opened from the outside. Light flowed inside. The large blond-haired blue-eyed man who had opened the door spoke to Accelerator.

"Welcome to the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations. I don't know how much we can do, but how about we work together to come up with a way to heal that girl?"

Accelerator did not respond.

He merely squeezed the memo in his hands and hung his head in front of Last Order.

He almost looked like a white angel lifting up a prayer.

And a being that surpassed humanity smiled silently in a distant city of science.

It was known as Aiwass.

A normal human may have been covered in a cold sweat. That was the nuance the smile held. The being spoke with that smile on its face that no one else knew the true meaning behind.

“His right hand truly is interesting.”

It was rather unclear whether being deemed “interesting” by Aiwass was a good thing for a human who wished to live a proper life.

Aiwass did not possess any thought patterns that cared about the life of a mere human.

That existence only took actions that followed its own interest.

“Perhaps I should have gone to meet him before he left the city.”

Part 7

The forest they had been using for cover was gone.

One attack helicopter remained.

They could no longer fool the attacker in the sky. It was truly 1 on 1. If they didn’t bring it down then, the privateer attack helicopter would slaughter the fleeing villagers. Among them was Takitsubo Rikou who could not move on her own. Hamazura and the others had to win.

And yet…

“Ooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

Everyone within the confined area of the anti-aircraft gun yelled. Even Hamazura and Digurv who were not actually touching the trigger raised their voices.

The attack helicopter approached.

A line of bullets raced along the ground.

The attack helicopter was going all out and it was quite fast. They couldn't hit it with the machine gun. They had a missile lock, but firing it would likely be useless. Normally, surface-to-air missiles were fired from behind a fleeing aircraft. The odds of hitting an object flying in at high speed were low. The surprise attack using the trees as cover had only worked because the enemy had been late in evading because they were sure that no counterattack was coming. The missile was of no use when the enemy was on full guard.

Glickin had said it was like a gunfight in a Western.

Their bullets would cross and the one that hit the other first would win.

That was what Hamazura thought.

But the attack helicopter had the clear advantage.

(Shit…!!)

Hamazura desperately operated the treads to move the vehicle away from the approaching line of bullets. But he wasn't going to make it. The helicopter subtly adjusted its path so it was aimed straight for the anti-aircraft gun again.

It was over.

Hamazura yelled out Takitsubo's name and a noise that felt like it was squeezing his heart exploded out. It was the sound of thick metal panels being penetrated.

His consciousness wavered.

His breathing literally stopped.

However, Hamazura did not die.

The sound that had slammed into his ear drums had not been the sound of the anti-aircraft gun being blown away.

The ominous noise had come from the attack helicopter flying through the sky.

It was the sound of a 3.5 meter sword skewering the helicopter horizontally.

The letters on the side that said “Ascalon” seemed burned into his eyes.

“…Hah?”

Hamazura let out that stupid-sounding voice in response to the ridiculous scene. Even though his life had been saved, part of him did not want to accept what he had just seen.

Meanwhile, an even more unreasonable reality unfolded before his eyes.

Someone had jumped on top of the attack helicopter flying 20 meters up in the sky. Yes. Someone had jumped up from the white ground. It was a large man wearing blue clothing. He was holding the grip of the large sword that had stabbed into the helicopter. He then swung the sword around.

That king of the sky was thrown about like a toy hammer.

Obeying gravity, the large man landed in the center of the snowy field. At the same time, the large sword slammed into the ground. The attack helicopter exploded and orange flames scattered about the area.

“Stealing the enemy’s weapon and continuing to fight in order to protect the people from unspeakable cruelty and to stop the shedding of unnecessary tears is most admirable,” a low male voice said from within the flames.

He was speaking in fluent English and even Hamazura could just barely manage to pick out a word or two he understood.

Immediately afterwards, the flames were blown out from within.

A mass of water perhaps created from melted snow floated about the man. It was an unnatural sight like seeing a drink spilled in zero gravity.

“I do not know the details of the situation, but I, Acqua of the Back, will be presumptuous enough to lend you my help.”

Various feelings crossed paths and the chance meetings of the protagonists created even further stories.

The time to fight back had begun.

As long as they continued to run forward without losing sight of their goals within that large and intense war, that world that continued to bring smiles to people’s faces would not be so easily destroyed.

War Report

In a hospital in Rome, a single room was covered in an odd atmosphere.

It was peaceful.

It seemed like the image of the person sleeping there filled every corner of the room.

The man lying on the bed was the Roman pope.

That old man who should have been enshrined in a cathedral deep within the Vatican was wearing a surgical gown and had tubes sticking into his mouth and nose.

A young priest shook his head as he entered the hospital room.

He may have been praying somewhere in his heart.

Praying that the legendary old man lying there would get up even after he had fallen victim to the chaos spreading throughout the world.

"…No one can stop Fiamma's tyranny," the young priest said as if he were squeezing out the words. "The Cardinals who have seen his power are either overcome with fear or are following him hoping it will be to their advantage. And of all things, some have come forward saying a new pope needs to be selected in the middle of this war. A great magical battle is occurring between England and France. Most likely, Fiamma is backing France. …No, it isn't just in that one place. This war is spreading throughout the world exactly as Fiamma wants."

No response came back to the young priest.

That fact was enough to almost make the priest collapse. However, the situation

did not end there. A nun burst in to the hospital room breathing heavily.

“E-emergency!!”

“We are in the presence of the pope!!” rebuked the young priest and the nun cowered a bit.

However, her face remained pale and her mouth flapped open and closed like a fish out of water.

“The people of Rome are saying they are fed up with supporting this war!! They have begun to gather together into a large group! They may be headed for the Vatican!!”

Officially, World War III was between Russia and Academy City, but the people were vaguely aware that Academy City and England were allies and that Russia and the Roman Catholic Church were supporting each other. A few units of the Italian army had actually been deployed to help with the war.

The Cardinals who governed the Roman Catholic Church had been charmed by Fiamma’s power. They were no longer of any use. The normal citizens who were acting out of proper indignation may have held the power that would actually change history.

But…

“…We need to stop them.”

“Father?”

“Historically, a few revolutions of the people have succeeded, but those only succeeded because careful preparations were made beforehand! A sudden riot like this will not change history!! At this rate, they will merely end up being slaughtered by the Roman Catholic battle units!!”

“Th-then, what do we do!?”

“They are thinking seriously about the future of the Roman Catholic Church. That is why we must hold them in check before this becomes a true riot. We can’t let them die.”

The young priest and the nun hurriedly left the hospital room, but the priest stopped at the exit. He looked back at the Roman pope who was lying on the bed and some words leaked from his mouth.

“If you could only show your face and give a few words to the people… That alone may be enough to wipe away everyone’s worries…”

The young priest shook his head as if to shake away that impossibility. He then headed for the area of Rome where the riot was beginning in order to realistically solve the problem.

The hospital room returned to its peaceful atmosphere.

And then the impossible happened.

The Roman pope’s fingertips moved.

It was just a slight twitch, but the pope’s eyelids then opened as if that had been a trigger. He pulled the tubes from his mouth and nose, sat up in the bed, and looked around. It was not the luxurious clothes of the pope, but a simple religious habit was hanging on the wall.

The pope grabbed the remote control on the side table and turned on the TV. As he listened to the news, he removed his surgical gown and changed into the habit.

The news informed him of the tragedy in the world.

A mother was shown grieving over the unreasonable violence. The announcer’s words continued adding to the unease. A girl was shown praying. The report said her father had been missing ever since an explosion occurred near their house. Someone was crying and asking why the war had happened.

The pope remained silent for a bit.

Before taking his next action, he opened a magical communication line directly within his head.

“Hi, you dandy gentleman. Do you still have your position as the Roman pope?”

“Vasilisa.”

During some talks he had gone through with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch, in order to strengthen their cooperative relationship, he had secretly exchanged means to communicate with her.

“It seems the Cardinals are trying to choose a new pope. I’m sure I have already lost my authority. My words are not enough to stop this war.”

“And yet you still stood back up. Knowing that is more than enough.”

“What are you doing now?”

“Hmm?”

A loud noise was transmitted along with her voice and the pope scratched at his head.

He frowned.

That had clearly been an explosion. And it hadn’t been just one or two. Multiple explosions had come in quick succession. He heard cries of anger along with them. Vasilisa was likely having a magical battle with someone while she spoke with him.

“Do you wanna know what’s going on? I’m in the middle of making a group of rebellious subordinates cry. Ah ha ha. This perverted woman magician named Skogsfru has snot pouring down her face. You’re the type that is moved to tears by hearing that brothers and sisters are fighting, right?”

Vasilisa’s tone of voice did not change.

From that alone, the pope could tell just how one sided that battle was.

“…Go easy on them. They are your subordinates, right?”

“I thought you’d say that,” Vasilisa said while giggling in a way that made it difficult to tell how serious she was. “But how are you supposed to put an end to this war when you’re so bad at this kind of thing?”

“I just do what must be done,” the pope replied simply. “I do what must be done not as the pope in charge of two billion followers but as a single follower of the Roman Catholic Church. I promised that mercenary that if the church turned majorly in the wrong direction that I would stop it from the inside.”

After saying that, the Roman pope continued speaking under his breath.

“I contacted God’s Right Seat in order to more efficiently save the people, but it seems the Lord still has plenty more trials for me.”

The pope opened the window of the hospital room and unhesitatingly jumped out.

A new fight began for that old man.

Fiamma of the Right had returned to the base within Russia.

“Don’t be so scared, Nikolai,” Fiamma said while walking.

“You started this war,” responded the voice of a man in the prime of his life from the book-shaped communications spiritual item.

“Technically, I only suggested that you go to war. You all are the ones that officially pulled the trigger, right?”

“You suggested we go to war because Russia would not be in a good position after a war between the magic side and the science side, but look how it has turned out! Have you not heard what Academy City’s forces including their unmanned weapons are doing!?”

“That’s why I told you not to be so scared.”

“If the situation continues like this, we will both lose our strongholds. Don’t tell me you don’t understand what that means. If you do not have a plan, we’re done. Once we’re rid of you, we will deal with this war we started in our own way. And we will find the method that will bring about the least damage.”

“How pessimistic. And you were secretly preparing for war behind the

Patriarch’s back, so the Russian Orthodox Church would be after you too in that situation.” Fiamma’s shoulders shook slightly with laughter. “Here’s a question for you: What if I had a hidden weapon that could turn this all around in an instant?”

“Did you get a nuclear weapon or something? Sorry, but Russia has plenty of those,” Nikolai said quickly. There was scorn in his voice. “From the test firing of ballistic missiles, we already know we can’t reach Academy City or any organizations working with them. Switching out the warhead is meaningless if it won’t hit. With their perfect interception, a nuclear weapon won’t stop them.”

“Archangel Gabriel.”

“!?”

Nikolai stopped speaking upon hearing the two words Fiamma whispered.

“Although you might know her better as Misha Kreutzev.”

“You have her?”

“I have the nun to act as the medium. What if I were to shape that base medium into the archangel and use it as my pawn? Just so you know, I can send it out at any time. Now then. Is the state of the war you’re so worried about really something that cannot be dealt with?”

Nikolai Tolstoy was the type of person who would attempt to profit from any conflict that cropped up and he immediately began his overly optimistic calculations. Fiamma heard excited speaking over the communications spiritual item, but he wasn’t really listening.

Ignoring the book-shaped spiritual item, Fiamma muttered under his breath.

“(Of course, my true goal in obtaining that is something else. The fact that I am of Michael but I can make the power of Gabriel my own shows that detestable ambiguity of the elements.)”

His thoughts cut off there and Fiamma then loudly spoke as if giving an announcement to the entire world.

“Now, it is time for the fun of Project Bethlehem.”

“…What?”

Ekalielya A. Pronskaya , the Russian Air Force pilot fighting above the Sea of Japan, frowned. The words of the man aboard one of Academy City’s large fighters were coming over the communications device in her helmet.

“Like I said: the Kremlin Report.”

They were both flying around in cutting edge masses of metal, but the enemy soldier seemed a bit exasperated.

“It’s the most important manual for the defense of Russia. If you’re in the army, I’m sure you’ve at least heard of it.”

“…”

She had heard that name before.

But it was not something that she had the official authority to view. It was something like a legend that had spread throughout the military. She didn’t even know if it actually existed. Ekalielya was not surprised that the enemy knew of the Kremlin Report. She was surprised they knew of the (supposedly) unrecorded rumors of it.

“Do you know what it contains?”

“Do I need to answer that?”

“A bacterial wall.”

The Academy City pilot suddenly changed the subject. That was how Ekalielya interpreted it, but she was wrong. There was a connection.

“It’s a killer virus that is spread through the air. It enters the blood vessels through the respiratory organs and the skin. On top of that, it can break down oil content. Not only does it kill animals, but it can also eat holes in the filters of the

masks and ducts to defend against bacteriological weapons. Once it's released, it can't be dealt with using the normal methods."

"What are you trying to say?"

"The Kremlin Report is a defense manual for the nuclear firing facilities. If a military force invades the country and it seems the nuclear facilities will be taken, a bacterial wall will be distributed near the facilities in order to eliminate the people there without damaging the facilities. That is what the Kremlin Report is for."

"…"

"Of course, no evacuation warning will be sent to the Russian soldiers working at the facilities or the civilians living in the area. The manual gives top priority to safely securing the facilities. No effective vaccine for the bacterial wall has been created. It is even highly resistant to heat treatment. There was a report that extremely high concentrations of ozone could be used to annihilate the bacteria, but…it's obvious what would happen to the infected people if that method was used."

Ekalielya's hand gripping the stick started to tremble slightly.

If that were true, the meaning of the war had changed.

Academy City was not fighting to make the people of Russia suffer. The leaders of the Russian army had started the war. Academy City was fighting to prevent the Russian army from continuing in that fashion and ending up going ahead with a plan that would bring suffering to the Russian people they were supposed to be protecting.

She felt the core of her heart starting to break.

But Ekalielya shook her head.

That's right. It was possible that story was just propaganda being used to rid her of her fighting spirit.

"Those are just the words of the enemy. Like I can trust you! You're using military force to enter my country and aim your weapons at the people there!!

I’m not going to overlook your invasion because of some baseless story!!”

“I thought you’d say that,” the Academy City pilot said cheerfully. “So I prepared this.”

She heard a slight noise.

The meters and gauges on modern fighters were displayed on digital monitors. One of the small LCD monitors suddenly changed what it was displaying.

A communications port had been forcibly released and information was being forced into it.

But that was not what shocked Ekalielya.

She felt as if her heart would stop when she saw the numbers and text displayed on the screen.

“What do you think?” asked the Academy City pilot. “Are your superiors really trying to protect the Russian people?”

Second Princess Carissa also mentioned the Kremlin Report.

Carissa and the Femme Fatale were so close to each other that their noses were almost touching. As they pressed their swords together, they moved their heads even further forward than the blades.

The sword of light created from the fragment of Curtana Second and Durendal the sword of France.

As those two legendary weapons clashed, they exchanged words.

“…What?”

“As the brains, you should be able to determine whether what I am saying is true or not given the situation and level of technology in Russia as well as the degree to which Academy City has invaded. Or are you going to go the boring old route of insisting to see the Kremlin Report with your own eyes before you’ll believe

me?”

A great amount of power exploded between the two blades.

They both moved back about 10 meters.

The Femme Fatale spoke quietly while holding up Durendal.

“No matter what type of justification you have, you still plan to use France as a stepping stone to interfere in Russia. And France is achieving growth from the protection of the Roman Catholic Church, so we cannot simply ignore their orders. Even if this Kremlin Report is real, it is no reason for me to hold back my blade.”

“Are you serious?”

“You started a coup d’etat and planned to conquer the people of Europe in order to protect the people of your country.”

“I had deemed that necessary, yes.”

Carissa did not deny it.

Instead of making convenient excuses, she readily admitted to her own unsightly mistake.

“But I have no intention of killing anyone whose death is not necessary for the protection of my people. Not a single one.”

“…”

“What connection is there between the protection of the French people and the suffering of the Russian people by the activation of the Kremlin Report?”

“Well…”

“The protection of the Roman Catholic Church? Is that really what you yourself wanted? Are they truly protecting you? Aren’t you even now bringing a crisis to your own people by starting this unneeded war due to pressure from the Roman Catholic Church?”

The Femme Fatale fell silent.

Carissa silently held up the fragment of Curtana Second and the sword of light it created.

“France is the only country in Europe that can make a genuine magical attack on England. Everyone knows that this isn’t the Roman Catholic Church’s war. It’s Fiamma’s war. …If it weren’t for this skirmish we would be headed to Russia. Even now, we could still avoid the worst case scenario.”

She did not hesitate.

She couldn’t allow herself to.

“So what will you do? I had determined that France was my archenemy. Are you really this disappointing an existence?”

Academy City’s 23rd district was a collection of air and space technology and many different types of aircraft were on standby there. Normally, most of them were passenger planes used to transport personnel and goods, but it was currently dyed with the colors of the military. A large number of fighters, bombers, and transport planes were lined up and maintenance staff members were running around between them.

There was one specific bomber among them.

It was an HsB-02 supersonic bomber.

It was over 80 meters long. With its maximum speed of over 7000 kph, it could transcend the limits within the atmosphere of the earth.

It was a bomber, but it was not filled with explosives. Its bay was almost empty, but those who knew of its contents felt a chill down their backs. Something much more fearsome than a mere bomb was loaded within.

“Hm hm hmmmn,” hummed a female voice.

Along with that voice that seemed to be enjoying itself, a few sparks could be

heard. There was a single seat inside and someone was sitting in it. It was a girl who had lost her left arm and whose right eye had been crushed. The edge of her yellow coat was burned black and a bluish white arm of light was sticking out of it. Countless pieces of medical equipment were lined up next to the chair and a number of tubes and cords were stuck to the girl's body.

Mugino Shizuri.

Academy City's #4 Level 5.

Meltdowner.

The reason it had been decided that she would be sent to the war front in Russia was quite simple.

"…Let's have some fuuun, Haaamazuraaa."

Meanwhile, another Level 5 boarded a different bomber.

"W-wahh!? Wh-what's going on!?" yelled the pilot.

A group of men wearing black clothes were supposed to have boarded the bomber. They were a special unit that was going to parachute down into Russia. The unit's orders were to confirm the actions of a Level 0 known as Imagine Breaker and to quickly attack and knock him unconscious if he were confirmed to have joined an enemy group.

They were not espers.

The bomber was supposed to hold a group of professionals who were armed with the latest weaponry and who could take out their target with superhuman movements.

So why were they all unconscious in that large space?

And who was that middle school-aged girl standing amid them with sparks crackling from her.

“Hi. I’m gonna be hitching a ride.”

“…!?”

Danger signals fired within the pilot’s mind. He tried to run out of the bomber and yell to inform others of the danger.

But sparks flew before he could.

A high voltage current regulated to not leave any after effects forcibly constricted the pilot’s muscles so he could not move even a finger.

“Gah…!?”

“Sorry about that. I’m pretty pissed off, so I can’t guarantee that I’ll hold back next time,” the girl, Misaka Mikoto, informed the pilot as he almost seemed to be hyperventilating. “Take me to Russia. It’d be great if you would just do your job as you were originally supposed to.”

“So what will you do?” said Aiwass somewhere in Academy City.

Aiwass was not human.

And across from it was another being that was not human.

“…”

She was a girl with long black hair that had a little bit of brown mixed in, cowering eyes covered by glasses, and a nice body. That was what she looked like, but she was actually an aggregation of AIM diffusion fields.

She was Kazakiri Hyouka.

As she faced Aiwass, her gaze did not hold its usual unease.

It was only a bit, but there was a core of fighting spirit there.

Aiwass spoke to her.

“A being similar to you has been confirmed to be in Russia. The being is known as the Archangel Gabriel. No, as she is still incomplete, I suppose I should call her Misha Kreutzev. At any rate, that is not an existence that can be dealt with by humanity’s current level of technology and military power. Once it begins, tragedy will come to every person in that land.”

“So you are telling me to fight?”

“That is also a very interesting option. But then there is no reason that you must choose that option.”

“…”

“So you have begun to think of a concrete plan. But you need not worry if you choose to do it. We tend to prefer this city that is filled with AIM diffusion fields, but by using the Sisters spread around the world as intermediaries and by applying directionality to the AIM diffusion fields, a belt-shaped AIM diffusion field area can be stretched from Academy City to the depths of Russia.”

“Does that…” Kazakiri hesitated and then started again. “Does that mean a virus will be sent to those people’s heads again?”

“If it is necessary,” responded Aiwass simply. “However, it will not be. It may be hard to understand with Last Order away, but your goal will most likely be in sync with what the Sisters want. Each individual unit may cooperate without an overriding order sent out from the command tower.”

“…”

“So what will you do?”

“What will *you* do?”

“Nothing.” It did not take even a second for the being to respond. “I only carry out actions that will bring about interesting things. The actions within Russia seem a bit interesting, but I find no value or interest in actually fighting there.”

That was Aiwass. Even if humanity was to go extinct and the world was to disappear, Aiwass’s expression would not change.

Which was more terrifying, someone who piled subtle plan on top of subtle plan to carry out a large plan or someone who held the power to destroy the world with a single fingertip but only acted on a whim or out of interest?

“I suppose I will go,” said Kazakiri after thinking for a while. “But on one condition.”

“Am I really the one you should be telling that to? I am not the one who has come up with this overblown plan.”

“Please do not touch my friends.”

“As long as they do not prove to be interesting, I won’t.”

“…If you do, I will become your enemy even if it means mutual destruction.”

“You are much too naïve if you think you can threaten me,” said Aiwass with a slight smile. “That kind of statement could very well spark my interest.”

Above the Sea of Japan, the pilot of the Academy City supersonic fighter gave a worried cry for the first time since the battle began.

“!? Evade!! Circle around nooooooooooooooooooowwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww!!!!!”

“?”

Ekalielya of the opposing Russian Air Force frowned, but figured out what was going on immediately afterwards.

Something large shot by between the two planes.

An explosive noise and a shock wave sliced through the air shortly thereafter. Ekalielya’s state of the art fighter was shaken like it was a leaf. If she hadn’t been in such a maneuverable and stable Russian fighter, she would have stalled and crashed. She could see that even the over 80 meter long Academy City fighter had been affected.

“What…was that!?”

It had come from the direction of Academy City. It was probably something they had developed. Given the situation, it was probably some cutting edge aircraft. However, Ekalielya could not believe what she had seen with her own eyes. What she had just seen had clearly ignored all common knowledge of aviation. It was beyond the idea of a UFO. A UFO was usually thought of as being a metal aircraft made with unknown technology or a mystery that was still on a level where humans could more or less accept it. It was a type of craft that a living being was controlling from the inside.

But what she had seen was different.

What Ekalielya had seen for a split second as it flew past was…

“An…angel…?” she muttered. “What was that?”

“Dammit, don’t ask me. I’m just as surprised as you are.”

They had no way of knowing, but it was a being known as Fuse Kazakiri.

But this time, she was not being controlled by a third party. Her eyes held her own will. As she flew through the sky, something extended from her right hand. It was a sword. It gave her a mass of destructive power that did not suit her normal self.

It was as if her fighting spirit was displaying itself externally.

Fuse Kazakiri flew through the Russian sky faster than anything else.

With her simple desire to protect her friends, events were developing towards a direct clash between angels.

Yes.

Science and magic.

The fight would be between two angels created by those completely different methods.

Kamijou Touma headed for the center of that battlefield.

He sat within one of the vehicles in the convoy from the Elizalina Alliance. One of the trucks had been sent elsewhere with Accelerator and Last Order inside, but the rest were headed to Fiamma's base.

Kamijou had found pieces of parchment in Accelerator's pocket.

He hadn't touched them more than that because they may have been magical items, but he left Index's name instead. He left the name of the girl who would be able to tell him what the parchments meant.

"…That's right," he said with a small smile.

The fight against Academy City's #1 had been unexpected, but he had gained something from it.

"What am I worrying about? Like I have any right to say any self-important things to Accelerator."

Lessar looked over at Kamijou from the seat next to him.

While still staring forward, he smiled with enough force that it looked like he was about to punch away who he had been up to then.

"What's all this about reasons and justifications? I don't need any of that!! Am I not allowed to stand up to fight without a logical motive!? Index is suffering. She can't show me her usual smile. I'll fight with just that!! That's enough! I'm not thinking up any excuses!! I'm not gonna spend any more time worrying and worrying about finding a logical reason!!"

There was an unknown core to his voice.

It was the same as when he had unhesitatingly stood up to the new queen who held Curtana Original during the coup d'etat in London.

"Would everything really be resolved if I just left everything to Fiamma!? Why does it matter if I have a guilty conscious regarding Index!? Whatever that

bastard says, it won't change my desire to save her!! No matter how much self-important shit he says, it won't stop me!!"

It was back.

The driving force that gave that boy strength was back to its normal place.

"I'm not protecting her because that's the right thing to do!! I'm not saving her because it says to in the rule book and I therefore have no choice!! I'm doing it because I want to!! So there's no reason for me to stop!! There's no need to argue about whether it's right or not and there's no need to search for material to use in that argument!!"

After yelling all that out, Kamijou fell silent.

Finally, he continued in a quiet voice.

"It's true that I'm a horrible person. I'm a terrible person who continued to deceive Index. The way I lived my life, I may not be able to proudly say I protected her."

Kamijou Touma gathered strength in his right fist and stared forward as he spoke.

"But the one I should be bowing my head down to for that…isn't Fiamma."

St. George's Cathedral in London had become an important "invisible fortress" for the war. A large number of magicians were rushing around working to deal with the invasion from France and indirectly working to help with the situation after the large war was over, but there was one person among them all who was removed from that overall flow.

He was Stiyl Magnus.

He was a battle member of Necessarius, but he did not head for the battlefield. He had no real interest in the war. Stiyl was in the cathedral as a guard for the girl who was sleeping on a bed in the large room.

She was Index, a nun who held 103,000 grimoires in her brain.

That had happened well before the appearance of that boy with the strange right hand.

And so…

“Hell no,” the magician said strongly while staring ahead and holding a cigarette in his mouth.

A woman with long blonde hair stood a few meters away. Her hair was so long it seemed to be about 2.5 times longer than she was tall.

She was Laura Stuart.

She was the Archbishop of the Anglican Church and the leader of Necessarius. She had enough authority that Stiyl would normally have been forbidden to speak to her on an even level.

But Stiyl’s expression was stern.

His gaze seemed to be that of one staring at his enemy.

On the other hand, Laura showed no sign of warning him about his impoliteness as she just stood there smiling.

“Oh, but I only came here to bring a gift to my cute subordinate who is suffering so much. I brought some fruit.”

“…There were two remote control spiritual items for her. Fiamma stole the one for the Royal Family, but the Anglican one was untouched. And it’s pretty damn clear who has it,” Stiyl said in a low, quiet voice. “To prevent Fiamma from misusing the knowledge of the 103,000 grimoires, you’re trying to cut in with the Anglican device, aren’t you? Currently, Fiamma’s has the stronger connection because it was activated first. That’s why you want to mess with her body in order to change the priority.”

“Oh, what an excellent idea. I hadn’t thought of that. How about we try it?”

“I said, hell no!! She’s already suffering from the great load. Who knows what

could happen to her if you put an even greater load on her!!”

“Hm. Even if your delusional ideas are true,” Laura said speaking down to Stiyl, “I am the head of the church. I have plenty of people I can use. How long do you really think you can last?”

“If it comes to that…”

Stiyl spat his cigarette out onto the floor of the solemn cathedral.

He suddenly held a number of rune cards in his hand.

“…then I just have to destroy the person at the top.”

“I see, I see. That’s quite something.”

Laura Stuart shrugged and pulled a spiritual item that fit in her palm out of the fruit basket she held.

Stiyl’s expression twisted in anger and Laura continued speaking.

“But will things just wait around for you to do so?”

“What?”

Stiyl didn’t even have time to ask again.

Someone slowly got up from the bed behind him.

It was Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

She was the girl that Stiyl Magnus wished to protect more than anything else in the world. But she was acting oddly. Index looked around once with her eyes that were as emotionless as camera lenses and then moved her small lips to speak.

“…Warning… Kshhh…Chapter 4…kshhh….Verse 8. Confirming connection… with remote…user. Kshhh…Approving disclosure of information… Cutting off transmission….of information…while in operation…. Beginning automatic elimination…of dangerous element…”

With an odd noise, various lights danced around Index.

In no time at all, they began drawing complex magic circles.

An even greater load was put on the small girl's battered body.

"What will you do, Stiyl?"

Laura's cheerful voice echoed throughout the cathedral adding further pressure to Stiyl.

She played with history's worst spiritual item in her hands.

"I'll give you a chance, so do something about this. If you can't, I'll do something about it."

"This is…"

Stiyl clenched his teeth.

“This is the job I have always been doing!!”

Hearing his yell, the girl with the machine-like eyes turned her head toward the flame magician.

“…Enemy confirmed. Now analyzing…the enemy’s spells and…construction a corresponding local weapon…”

Afterword

To those who have continued reading from Volume 1: welcome back.

To those who bought the 22 books all at once: welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

The war between science and magic is finally here! Previously, it was a war within a single country, but this time the scale of the fight has been increased even further.

Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, and Hamazura Shiage are looking at a single war from their different viewpoints. And the world is full of other people who are less recognized but who are also risking their lives in the fight. I changed the construction of the story a bit from the usual focus on a single protagonist to show that stories of dangerous fights can be found anywhere you look during a war on a worldwide scale.

As the story came to its end, the hearts of all the people slowly started to come together in a single direction. That flow will not be exterminated. In a large fight, do not make “excuses” and do not stray from your path. That is most likely the most important thing needed for all the protagonists to have victory in the large flow that is a war.

Whether they succeed or not, watching over their actions is quite moving.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Haimura-san and my editors Miki-san and Fujiwara-san. Things have gotten even more complicated in this story. With science, magic, good, and evil all mixing together, I’m guessing it was difficult to decide what overall direction to take the illustrations in. I am truly thankful that they have gone along with my ridiculous requests every single time.

And I give my thanks to the readers. To be honest, I doubt I would have been allowed to write a story like this in the very first volume. I truly thank you for supporting this environment that lets me do whatever I want.

Now it is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

How many protagonists are there going to be?

-Kamachi Kazuma

1. ↑ The full the translation of this ability's name is ***Premonition Perception***. While the more concise word Precognition is used throughout these translations, this ability is different from what one normally expects of precognition.

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 20

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Translated by **Js06** & **Wilfriback**

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Proclamation of War - Wilfriback – Completed
Prologue   - Js06 – Completed
Chapter 1  - Js06 – Completed
Chapter 2  - Js06 – Completed
Chapter 3  - Js06 – Completed
Chapter 4  - Js06 – Completed
War Report - Js06 – Completed
Afterword  - Js06 – Completed
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